

Acts

Bible Commentary 2021

by

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Jesus Returned To The Father – Acts Chapter 1

Introduction (Acts 1:1-5)

John baptized men with water but the Lord Jesus Christ baptized men with the Holy Ghost. Why then do we put such emphasis on water baptism in church? Is this just a tradition of men or is it a genuine Christian ordinance? When I read scriptures like this it makes me wonder how important water baptism is in comparison with being baptized in the Holy Ghost.

Luke continued his record of the gospel of Jesus Christ in this book. The Lord died on the cross, he was buried, and now risen again. Luke began with the Lord's final instructions to his disciples before he ascended back to his Father.

Jesus showed himself alive to his disciples with verifiable proof. He told Thomas to put his fingers in his nail prints and his hand into his side. The Lord ate fish and honeycomb with his disciples. He had breakfast with them beside the sea of Tiberias. The Lord spent 40 days with them after his resurrection before he went back to heaven.

Jesus talked to them about the kingdom of God. He gave them specific instructions to assemble in Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father, which was the Holy Ghost. Keep in mind the promise of the Father which Jesus mentioned was the Holy Ghost. God's promise to those who believe in Jesus was the Holy Ghost. This was the Father's promise: he would give us the Holy Ghost. The Lord Jesus baptized us in the Holy Ghost. Without the Holy Spirit we can do nothing. It is the Holy Spirit who produces the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23). He produces the life of God within us and enables us to be a witness for him in this world and to live for Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the one who applies the finished, completed work of Christ to the believer. He enables us to live for God.

Two items to remember from these verses. The Holy Ghost was the promise of the Father. Men can baptize you with water but only Jesus can baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

The Ascension (Acts 1:6-11)

The Lord's disciples wanted to know when God would restore the kingdom to Israel. Why did they ask this question? The Old Testament prophets of Israel said this would happen. And it will happen. When Jesus comes back at the second coming and establishes his kingdom over the planet then at that time

the nation of Israel will once again hold a prominent place on earth. God's promises to the nation of Israel will be completely fulfilled just as the prophets said. All scripture will be fulfilled. However, when the disciples asked Jesus this question it was not yet the right time.

Jesus redirected their attention to what would happen to them next. The next item on the calendar was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The Lord charged them with the mission of spreading the gospel all over the world, beginning at Jerusalem, and spreading out from there to Samaria and to the uttermost part of the earth. Read the book of Acts carefully and you see this was the pattern of how the gospel spread. It started in Jerusalem and traveled from there, through Samaria, and is still to this day spreading to every nation. In a sense, the book of Acts never ended. It is still happening today. We still wait for Jesus to come back and establish his kingdom on earth. We still wait for Israel to receive the fulfillment of God's promise to her. This day is fast approaching.

After Jesus said this he ascended into heaven on a cloud. The disciples watched him as he ascended into heaven. What would it have been like to see Jesus going up in the clouds? We may never know but we will know what it will be like to see him return in the same manner.

Angels who appeared told the disciples that Jesus would return in the same manner he left. One day Jesus will return on the clouds and set foot on this planet again. This is what every born again Christian looks forward to. This is why we pray "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day, according to the scriptures. He ascended back to the Father, and is now at the right hand of God the Father making intercession for us. He saves to the utmost anyone who comes to God by him because he lives forever and intercedes for us. Call on his name today. Everyone who calls on the name of Jesus will be saved.

Matthias Replaces Judas (Acts 1:12-26)

Following the Lord's instructions the disciples returned to Jerusalem. Perhaps they didn't quite understand what was next but they knew enough about the Lord that they obeyed what he said. I've found this works the best for me. Just obey the Lord and maybe you understand later on. This is walking by faith rather than sight.

All the disciples, including the Lord's family, gathered and prayed together. There were about 120 disciples gathered in one accord.

Peter took a leadership role and brought up the problem caused by the betrayal of Judas. They understood what happened in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus fulfilled scripture. Even what Judas did was foretold by Israel's prophets.

Peter pointed out the need for another man to take the place of Judas. They needed 12 apostles, and so decided to ask the Lord to add another apostle to the group. This man had to be a witness of the Lord's resurrection and someone who was with the group from the beginning during the time of John's baptism. The qualifications for becoming one of the 12 apostles, therefore, were personal experience with the life, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

They prayed and cast lots to see who would be the new apostle. This might sound strange to us but it was a tradition they understood from their Jewish background. The Jewish priest relied upon a similar method of determining God's will using a Urim and Thummim. The lot fell to Matthias to be counted as one of the 12 apostles.

There is a reason the Lord chose 12 apostles. Perhaps it was because there were 12 tribes in Israel. I don't know the meaning of the number 12 but this was important to them. Notice how the Bible gives close attention to details such as counting people and items. Even in the New Testament when Jesus fed the multitudes we know exactly how many fish and loaves of bread he started with, how many baskets of scraps were left over, and how many people were fed. This pattern of counting in the Bible is something to consider about the character of God.

We will give an account one day of our lives to the Lord. God notices every single detail about our lives. He loves us so much he counts every hair on our head. He knows every word we will speak while it is still on our tongue. How much do you think God knows about your life? He knows everything. He knows every word you spoke, and every thought you had. Yet he loves you and sent his Son Jesus Christ to die for you upon the cross. Are you ready to trust in him today? Are you ready to allow Jesus to be your Lord and Savior today?

Baptism Of the Holy Spirit – Acts Chapter 2

The Holy Ghost on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13)

Church denominations have parted ways over the content of this Bible chapter. There are entire groups of Christians who define their churches based on the verses in this section of scripture. One thing we all have in common, no matter what denomination we belong to, is that none of us would be here today without the events described here. This was the promise of the Father, and the promise of Jesus. This was the evidence that Jesus had returned to the Father. He sent the Holy Spirit. We have a clear description of what the disciples experienced on the day of Pentecost.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon these disciples was accompanied by supernatural signs and wonders. They were able to hear the sound from heaven of a rushing mighty wind. They saw cloven tongues like fire which came down and sat upon them. No matter how you read these bible verses you cannot separate the supernatural element from this. Men try hard to remove the supernatural from the baptism of the Holy Spirit. However, even if you do not believe tongues are for today you still have to admit that speaking in tongues accompanied the baptism of the Holy Spirit for these believers.

I won't go much into the controversy between tongue talkers and those who do not except to say I know the Holy Spirit is real. Speaking in tongues is real today. We cannot separate the supernatural from God. God works in ways we do not understand. He is the creator of the universe. If he wants to enable a man to speak in tongues why should we stand against that man? Are we so sure we understand everything about God and how he works in the lives of men?

I won't debate about this. I rejoice in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This was the beginning of the church. This is when the church was born and empowered to be witnesses for Jesus in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

May we be filled again today with a fresh outpouring of God's Holy Spirit.

Peter Addresses The Crowd (Acts 2:14-36)

Again, we see Peter took a leadership role in the early church. On the day the church was born the apostle Peter, along with the other apostles, stood up and declared the gospel to the people gathered.

Peter addressed the men of Judaea, and everyone in Jerusalem, and corrected their accusation that those baptized in the Holy Spirit were drunk. He told them that what they heard and saw was the fulfillment of bible prophecy. The prophet Joel foretold God would pour out his Holy Spirit upon his people. Sons and daughters would prophesy. Young men would see visions. Old men would dream dreams. God poured out his Spirit upon his servants and they did prophesy. This was the true description of what happened. Men and women were baptized in the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues, and prophesied.

Notice that the purpose of this experience was to bring people to salvation. He says in verse 21, "... whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved..." The purpose in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was to bring people to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. God wanted people to be saved. The only way to be saved is to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and trust in his completed work upon Calvary.

Peter went on to lay out the gospel message. Christ died for our sins. He was buried, and he rose again on the third day. Peter quoted bible prophecy from the Old Testament to prove what happened was God's plan. Yes, evil men killed Jesus. What men intended for evil, God intended for good, to bring about salvation, not only for Israel, but also for the whole world. This reminds me of the account of Joseph in Genesis.

Peter concluded his sermon by telling everyone in Israel that Jesus Christ, who they crucified, but whom God raised from the dead was indeed their Messiah.

Today is the day of salvation. Listen to the words of the apostle Peter and call upon the name of the Lord so that you can be saved.

Three Thousand Believe (Acts 2:37-41)

The promise was the Holy Spirit. Pay careful attention to what Peter said about this promise. This promise was unto you (Israel), unto your children (Israel), and to "all that are afar off" (Gentiles), even as many as the Lord our God shall call. Who is this? This is us today. This is one of the strongest verses I can find to support the belief that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is for Christians today.

If you are a Christian then you must be filled with the Holy Spirit. If you are not baptized in the Holy Spirit then you are not a Christian.

Do I mean that every Christian should speak in tongues? Obviously, that is not the case. There are many Christians who do not speak in tongues, and even believe that speaking in tongues is not for today, yet they still love Jesus. They are filled with the Holy Spirit but do not speak in tongues.

How can you know you are filled with the Holy Spirit? Paul lists for us the fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. If you are filled with the Holy Spirit then you will bear the fruit of love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.

In the context of the book of Acts when you see men baptized in the Holy Spirit you also see supernatural miracles. The book of Acts does not separate faith, salvation, preaching, and miracles. It is all together in the same context. Is it today? Some would prefer that we leave out the supernatural aspect today but it is still there in the Bible.

The people who heard Peter preaching were convicted by the Holy Spirit. They realized they were guilty and were immediately alarmed and wanted to know what they could do to correct their sins. Peter told them to repent, be baptized, and believe in Jesus. As a result, they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Remember, in the context, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit was a supernatural miracle. It was not men making intellectual agreement to Bible doctrines. There was a supernatural change in the heart of men. Men became new creations in Christ Jesus. They were born again by the Holy Spirit. Some received the gift of speaking in tongues. Some received other spiritual gifts as we shall see later on in Paul's letters to the churches.

As a result of this one sermon three thousand people were saved and added to the church. There is no doubt this was a miracle from God and a true spiritual revival in the household of faith.

Call upon the name of the Lord today and be saved.

The Fellowship of Believers (Acts 2:42-47)

The Lord added people to the church daily. This is good to underline and remember. It is not special programs or outreaches which add people to the church. It is the Lord who adds people to his church. Men try hard to build their church numbers but it is the Lord who adds to the church. It is not up to us but it is up to the Lord. Our calling is to preach the gospel.

What is the apostles' doctrine? I think this is simply the gospel message of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul said he preached Christ and him crucified. It is important to keep the message simple so that people can be saved. When we add in a lot of other things it is easy to lose focus of what is most important. Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day.

I've heard some preachers say it was not wise for these early Christians to sell all their goods. The reason preachers think this way is because this looks a lot like communism. However, we cannot compare the church with a political ideology. The church and government are two completely separate things. I don't think the early Christians were wrong in putting their material resources together to help one another. I think this is exactly what they were supposed to do. People don't do this today because they are selfish and do not trust brothers and sisters in Christ. Everyone is independent and thinks he has to look out for number one (self). This is an American mindset that is hard to overcome as a Christian.

Christians live in community and not just on Sunday mornings. We have a watered down Christianity in America where people show up on a certain day of the week, go to a building where they smile and

shake hands, and sit through an hour long sermon. This is weak Christianity. Real Christianity is people living together and helping one another in every aspect of life and not just on Sunday morning.

Also, remember you cannot separate the supernatural from the church. There were miracles taking place in the early church. People had the fear of God in their lives. They knew the Lord was real, he was present, and he listened and saw everything happening in their midst. The Lord walked among them and they felt his presence. Do we feel God's presence today? If not, why? Is it because we do not love our brothers and sisters in Christ?

1 John 3:17, *"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"*

Does God Heal Today? - Acts Chapter 3

A Lame Man Walks (Acts 3:1-9)

Peter and John continued to go to the temple for prayer time. Not long after these events the religious institution would throw them out, but Peter and John were not trying to create a new religious system. What happened with the church was the work of the Holy Spirit, and it was not the work of men trying to create a new religion.

This was an example of a miracle from God. The Lord worked through Peter and John to heal the lame man. The man was lame from birth, and well known by the people going in and out of the temple area. He begged for money every day. Peter and John gave him something better than money. By the name of the Lord Jesus the man was healed. His healing was so dramatic that he immediately jumped to his feet, leaped up, and began to walk. He praised God and attracted a lot of attention.

Underline the part where Peter said he had no money. Peter had no silver or gold. Think about this for a minute and compare this description of the apostles to modern day preachers. Do you see a discrepancy between the apostles and preachers today? Do not be deceived by the American prosperity gospel. It is a false gospel which leads men into covetousness and idolatry.

Many times people think money is the answer, but God may have a better solution for us than what we can think of. The Lord may do something out of the ordinary in our lives which does not involve the method of provision through the world system.

This man was healed immediately. It was plain to everyone a miracle occurred and there was no explanation except God. The man healed knew it was God. He praised God for healing him.

Does God heal today? If a man asks this question he probably is under the spell of man-made systematic theology. If it is in the Bible then why would it not be for men today? Why did God give us the Bible if not for hope and faith and an example of what God can do to inspire our faith in him? Believe in God! Have faith in God! If you can believe then all things are possible.

Peter Spoke In Solomon's Colonnade (Acts 3:11-26)

After God healed the lame man a crowd gathered. Peter took the opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let's outline some of what Peter preached to them.

First, he made it clear the miracle did not happen because there was anything special about Peter or John. Peter denied the miracle happened because of his personal holiness or because he had special virtue. Instead, the miracle was a result of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter preached to Israel so he used the Hebrew scripture. He explained that the Lord Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of what the Bible said about the Messiah, the Son of God.

He said Israel crucified their Messiah and was led to this by the religious leaders. He acknowledged they did it in ignorance but were still accountable for their sins by God. The only hope for forgiveness is repentance of sins and faith in Jesus Christ.

Peter told them Jesus Christ is now in heaven but will return at a specific time in the future which he described as "the times of restitution of all things". There is a time when Jesus will return to earth and everything will be put right. There will be a great restoration of humanity and earth.

Peter pointed out that Moses spoke of the Lord Jesus Christ when he said a prophet like himself would come to Israel. This prophet Moses spoke about was indeed the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter reminded them of the warning Moses gave about this prophet. If they would not listen to this prophet they would be cut off from their people. Everyone who rejects Jesus Christ has no part in God's kingdom or plan.

The Lord came to Israel first. He came to his own people first to bless them in turning them away from their sins and to faith in Jesus Christ.

Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved.

Obedience To God – Acts Chapter 4

Peter and John Before The Sanhedrin (Acts 4:1-12)

Peter and John minded their own business. They went to the temple at prayer time and saw this lame man. Filled with compassion and with faith and with the knowledge the Lord Jesus Christ could help this man they spoke to him the word of life and restoration. Immediately by God's power the man was made whole. A crowd of people gathered to witness the miracle. Peter took the opportunity to preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many people believed the message. The attention of the religious leaders and temple security were alerted. They arrested the apostles.

The religious leaders did not believe in the resurrection. When they heard Peter preached Jesus Christ resurrected from the dead they were outraged. This madness led them to arrest the apostles and put

them in jail until the next day. This happened in the evening so they waited for daylight hours to process them. This was a courtesy not given to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The next day Peter boldly proclaimed the gospel. This was the fulfillment of the Lord's word that his disciples would be persecuted and brought before leaders to give testimony. Peter was filled with the Holy Ghost and preached to them the simple and amazing message of Jesus Christ.

Peter said they should know that it was not them who healed the man. The healing happened by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. This Jesus was the same Jesus they crucified but whom God raised from the dead. Read verse 12 again: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." This is a verse we should underline in our Bible and memorize. This is one of the bedrock truths of being a Christian. The Lord Jesus is exclusive. There is no other way to know God except through Jesus Christ. There is no other way to be saved from hell, no other way to be saved from our sins, no other way to be forgiven, no other way to be delivered from the devil. Jesus Christ is Lord. There is no other.

Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again from the dead on the third day. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved.

The Name Forbidden (Acts 4:13-22)

This is not the first time the religious leaders found themselves in this kind of situation. In John's gospel account Jesus healed a blind man on the Sabbath day, and the healed man received a trial similar to this one with Peter and John. The religious leaders constantly grappled with new experiences of the living God. All they had was a system of religion void of spiritual power. Now they were confronted with uneducated men who spent time with Jesus. They did not know how to handle it.

The religious leaders were intimidated by the people who praised God. Everyone knew this was a genuine miracle and could not be denied. The man who was healed was over forty years old and lame since birth. No one could deny the miracle.

However, they insisted that Peter and John could no longer preach in the name of the Lord Jesus. Peter and John replied with a simple statement. They told the religious leaders to judge themselves whether or not they should obey God or them. The religious leaders were no longer leading men to the living God. What are men supposed to do when religious leaders are no longer on God's side? What do we do?

Peter and John told them they could only speak about what they saw and heard. The religious leaders threatened them. But what could they really do to Peter and John? They could not find any way (at that time) to punish them, because of the crowd of people. Note, religious leaders get their power from numbers of people they seduce to come underneath their system or name.

No one could deny God did this miracle. Peter and John told them the miracle was done through the only name by which men can be saved. This name is the name above all names: the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Believer's Prayer (Acts 4:23-31)

After Peter and John were released they returned to the other disciples and reported everything that happened. How did they respond to the threats of the religious leaders? They prayed to God to continue to use them to preach the gospel. They quoted Bible prophecy from Psalm 2 about the leaders of the world opposing the Son of God. This is important how they took scripture into their prayer and used this as a basis upon which to appeal to God. They prayed according to God's will, in God's way, and with God's word. What happened as a result of their prayers? The place was shaken where they were assembled and they were filled with the Holy Ghost and spoke God's word with boldness.

The gospel is opposed by the world and by leaders of dead and false religion. The enemy will threaten and try to forbid the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. What should our response be? Should we protest at city hall or the state capitol? No! What did these Christians do? They prayed to God and were baptized in the Holy Ghost. They continued to preach the gospel with boldness.

The prophecy about the world's opposition to the Lord Jesus was from Psalm 2. This shows us a pattern of how the world operates against God and the one whom God placed in charge. God made his son Jesus Christ Lord of all. Jesus is King over all the nations of the world. The powers of the world system always resist the Lord. They are opposed to the authority of God. Ultimately they fail just like the religious and political leaders who opposed the early church failed. Those who oppose the church always fall eventually. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church of the Lord Jesus.

How do we receive power to preach God's word? We need to pray and be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we are enabled to preach the gospel. Without the Holy Spirit we can do nothing. All of our efforts are in vain if we work in our own strength or willpower. The only thing that lasts is the work of the Holy Spirit through us. It is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord (Zechariah 4:6).

As Christians we understand the world system is set against us. We don't fight against the world system, but instead humble ourselves and pray for strength to preach the gospel. Our response to the world's evil is not protest but it is seeking the Lord for power to preach the gospel without compromise.

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes. The gospel is simple. Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again from the dead on the third day, according to the scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Preach this gospel, and lift up the name of Jesus Christ, and see what the Lord will do to save souls.

Sharing Among Believers (Acts 4:32-37)

The early Christian church did not believe in any political ideology such as communism. On the surface their actions may appear to be communism but was actually a spontaneous movement of God's people to support the ministry and take care of brothers and sisters in Christ. Communism does not work because those who claim to redistribute the wealth do not love Jesus and they do not love their comrades. It is not love that controls them but cold ideology.

In the case of the early church there was a practical expression of God's love demonstrated through believers who helped one another. They provided for the practical needs of one another. This could

never be implemented as a government system in the world because this kind of communal living required agreement in their faith in Jesus and their love for one another. You won't get this in the governments of the world. I do believe one day we will see something like this during the reign of Christ upon the earth after his return to the planet.

The book of James provides practical instruction on how faith should be accompanied by practical works. Faith needs to be coupled with practical actions of helping people.

It is easy for people to get confused. Some organizations exist completely to do good works but have nothing to do with the gospel, even organizations which were started by Christians (and most of them probably were at some point). Others, like many local churches, are only concerned with teaching but have no practical expression of good works to go with this. A well rounded church contains a proclamation of the gospel accompanied by practical help.

Ephesians 2:10, *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."*

Let's also remember the exhortation from Paul in Galatians 6:10, *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."*

Worthy To Suffer For Jesus – Acts Chapter 5

Ananias and Sapphira - (Acts 5:1-11)

These two were slain by the Holy Spirit but they were not Pentecostal. I doubt these two were even Christians. The reason I doubt they were saved is because this scripture said that "Satan filled thine heart". The devil filled the heart of Ananias and Sapphira. We can speculate as to why they did this. They saw people selling property and giving it to the church. Perhaps they thought this would gain them position within this group of Christians. They wanted prestige or position within the church. Why else would they do this?

It did not end well for these two. They attempted to lie to the Holy Spirit, and were both slain by the Holy Spirit. Peter did not kill these people. They were destroyed by the Lord himself. Why did such drastic measures take place? Remember, this was the beginning of the church. The Lord walked among these people. Remember how the Lord walked among Israel when they left Egypt? How many times did people die in the desert because of unbelief, or doubt, or rebellion? Unbelief is sin. Unbelief leads to sin. Sin always brings death. Sometimes death is sudden. Sometimes it comes later. But sin always brings death. The wages of sin is death.

The Lord gives us life. He gives us an opportunity to repent of sins and put our faith in him. These two had an opportunity to tell the truth but continued to lie. All liars have their part in the lake of fire. The Lord will not allow any liar among his people. Everyone who is fake, or phony, or who thinks he can live among God's people for a position will discover he made a mistake.

Revelation 21:8, *"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."*

Repent and believe the gospel. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved.

The Apostles Heal Many (Acts 5:12-16)

In this section we get a glimpse of the church walking in the authority of God's kingdom. Peter is mentioned, but he symbolized the work of the Holy Spirit through all of the apostles and the disciples. We see later miracles also happened by the hands of lowly deacons such as Stephen, so this was not only the Apostle Peter. He was mentioned as a sample representative of what happened in the entire church.

What happened in the church? Signs and wonders took place. People today are skeptical or afraid of miracles because of false teachers who do miracles. Yes, there are many false teachers who do signs by the power of Satan. This does not cancel out the God sent men who walk in God's authority. What better way to get the church to neglect the gifts of the Holy Spirit but by scaring them away from experiencing the living God. I'm afraid of false teachers but I'm also afraid of sincere Christians who cut people off from experiencing the supernatural power of God. Both are extremes and both deprive the church of God's presence. One is as bad as the other.

Many miracles happened among the people. They were in agreement and met at a place called Solomon's porch. These people made use of areas which belonged to the temple. A true revival took place under the nose of dead religion. Just as the enemy likes to invade the church with false teachers, so the Lord likes to invade dead churches with prophets and apostles. The Lord's work is carried out. It is not the Lord's will for men to perish in their sins but for everyone to repent and have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Men and women were saved on a daily basis. There was no distinction made between rich and poor, male and female, or between Jew and Gentile. People were saved all over the place, and continued to go forward despite opposition from organized religion and secular authorities.

Another thing which happened was that people were healed. People brought the sick into the streets so the shadow of an apostle might pass over them. People had faith in the Lord Jesus and knew he could heal them. They heard the news, they saw what happened, and people believed. People were healed and evil spirits cast out. The works of the devil were destroyed by the church.

May the Lord send revival again so that the poor may hear the gospel, the sick will be healed, and the work of the devil destroyed.

The Apostles Arrested and Freed (Acts 5:17-23)

God blessed the church. People were saved, needs were met, many were healed, and the devil was cast out of people. Don't think, however, the enemy will leave the work of God unanswered.

The religious leaders arrested the apostles. They were put in a common prison. Again, they were put in jail overnight, but this time the Lord did not leave them overnight. He sent an angel to break the apostles out of jail. The angel told them to go back to the temple and keep preaching the gospel.

The next day court was convened. When they sent for the prisoners they were gone. What happened? No doubt this was a new scenario for the religious leaders. Did they stop and think maybe they opposed the work of God? Not likely. Instead, they would double down on their opposition.

Sometimes people were left in jail and sometimes God got them out of jail. This is not the only time God brought people out of jail like this. There was another account where an angel broke Peter out of jail. John the Baptist was left to die in jail. Why? These are questions the Bible does not answer. We cannot answer. God is over all. We trust in God's love and wisdom.

After their arrest and escape the Lord sent them right back to work. God wants us to be steadfast and faithful and not give up the work he gave us. We keep sharing God's word no matter what. No matter what we suffer or endure this is the most important thing we can do with our lives. We are ambassadors for Jesus Christ. We are his witnesses. Keep preaching the word. Don't give up.

Christ died for our sins. He was buried and he rose again on the third day. Everyone who calls on the name of Jesus will be saved.

The Apostles Before The Sanhedrin (Acts 5:24-32)

If the religious leaders thought they had a problem when it was only Jesus healing and preaching then they never imagined the problem they now faced. Jesus was multiplied exponentially through these men who preached the gospel. The same thing Jesus did these men did. Signs, wonders, miracles, healing, devils cast out, the gospel preached to the poor. The more the religious leaders fought Jesus and his followers the more the gospel was magnified and the more people were saved.

This situation for the religious leaders: "...*they doubted of them where unto this would grow...*" They had no idea what they were dealing with and what would happen next. Men were broke out of jail with no trace. Healing happened in the streets. Demons were sent packing.

The religious leaders made an interesting statement: "...*ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us...*" But isn't this what they requested? "*Let his blood be upon us and our children?*" Didn't they agree to take responsibility for killing Jesus? Now, they reaped what they sowed. If they had humbled their heart and believed the good news then they would be saved. But they couldn't do that. Why? Because they would lose their prestige, power, and position. They would not let go of their power even though it was obvious their power was taken from them by God.

What did the apostles say when these religious leaders tried to forbid them from preaching the gospel? "We ought to obey God rather than men." Is there ever a time when we need to disobey the leaders over us? The only time when we can do this is when religious freedom is taken away or if the government asks us to commit sin. Otherwise, the Christian attitude should always be humility, submission, and obedience. The only time we can disobey is when it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ or if those over us try to force us to sin. That is the only time when we disobey.

The early church was clearly in a position where they had to disregard the command of the religious leaders. The leaders of their community were now actively fighting against God by their attempt to stamp out the church.

Peter and the apostles used this trial as another opportunity to preach the gospel! They were still preaching the crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ even in their testimony in this trial. They were a witness of the Lord Jesus and so was the Holy Ghost whom God gave to those who obeyed him.

Gamaliel's Advice (Acts 5:33-41)

When the apostles said they were on God's side and the Holy Ghost was given to them the religious leaders were infuriated. They were so angry they wanted to kill the apostles.

However, one man rose up among the religious leaders and cautioned them. The adviser was Gamaliel. From his speech we get another reason why the apostles of the Lord infuriated the religious leaders. The apostles gained a huge following of people. You can see this in Gamaliel's speech because he used examples of past uprisings when men gained a large following. He pointed out to them that all of these past uprisings came to nothing. Then he said something interesting which makes me wonder what he knew about the apostles. He said, "But if it be of God, you cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." How did he know this? Was he simply looking at all sides or did he believe in the Lord Jesus secretly?

The religious leaders were restrained from carrying out their murderous plans. Instead, they beat the apostles, forbade them to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

How did the apostles take this treatment? They rejoiced that they were found worthy of the Lord to suffer shame for his name! How remarkable is this way of thinking! They thought like this because they loved Jesus more than anything in the world. They loved him more than their own lives. To them, suffering for Jesus was an honor and a privilege. Is it for us today? Do we consider suffering for the sake of Christ an honor and a privilege? This should cause us to search our hearts and ask God to set us free from self-love and from the love of this current world system.

Christ died for our sins, he was buried, he rose again on the third day. Call on the name of Jesus and be saved.

Church Deacons – Acts Chapter 6

The Choosing of the Seven (Acts 6:1-7)

The early church faced persecution from the outside. The religious leaders persecuted the church, and individuals tried to infiltrate the church to gain position in the church by making big donations. Trouble came from within the church and among the people who were part of the church. The church grew and along with church growth came growing pains.

There was a complaint among the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministry. Here was a common tactic of the enemy. He tried to separate people along ethnic lines. This is an attack vector of the devil, and if we are conscious of this then we should seek to confront this with love, grace, forgiveness, and compassion.

The apostles were unable to take care of all these problems. Just like Moses was unable to judge all the people of Israel but needed help so the apostles found themselves needing brothers to come alongside them to help. God gave each man in the church a specific gift which he should use to serve others. The apostles instructed the disciples in the church to find seven men who were honest and full of the Holy Ghost. These seven were appointed as deacons to serve tables and take care of the widows. This plan was agreeable to everyone and so they chose seven men. Among them was Stephen who soon became the first martyr in the church.

The deacons took care of the ministry and the apostles continued to teach and preach the word. Multitudes continued to get saved and some who were saved were former priests.

Just like the early church we face problems today from without and from within. We should ask God for wisdom to know how to focus on priorities (God's word and prayer), while not letting other tasks go undone. The church was not a small group of elite men but it was all the members working together for the glory of God. When we read Romans 12 we see the church is a body with many members. Peter compared the church to a temple of stones built together. We belong to one another. We work together. We cannot succeed unless we are united. Our unity must be in the truth of the gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our agreement and he is our unity. When we as individuals agree with the Lord Jesus then we are united and made one in him.

The Arrest of Stephen (Acts 6:8-15)

One of the seven deacons was Stephen. This man was full of the Holy Ghost and had great faith. God used him to do miracles among the people. This was an example of how a common man in the church was used by God and known for signs in his ministry. He was a deacon in the church and zealous for the Lord Jesus. He spoke boldly for the Lord and attracted the attention of the religious leaders. Those who tried to dispute with him could not resist the Holy Spirit's wisdom. The Lord gives the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Since the religious leaders could not win an argument they decided to just kill him. They hired false witnesses to testify against him. Their lies were the same lies told about Jesus. They said he blasphemed and spoke against Moses and that place. As we shall see in his testimony Stephen probably knew more about Moses than all of them. He was not against Moses. He loved the one to whom Moses pointed: the Lord Jesus Christ.

An interesting description of Stephen was provided here. His face looked like an angel. What does that mean? He had a look of heaven on him. He was a man on whom the hand of God rested. It was obvious that Stephen was a man of God, and this trial was a lie and nothing but another way the Jews persecuted the church.

Stephen's story occupied a lot of space in the book of Acts. God remembers those who gave their life for him. Those who die as a witness for Jesus like this receive a special crown from the Lord. The Lord rewards those who persevere until the end. He loved not his life unto death (Revelation 12:11).

Again, we see what Jesus said fulfilled. Jesus said his disciples would suffer. He said they would be brought before courts. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would give his servants wisdom that could not be resisted. This is the wisdom given to Stephen. Jesus said his disciples would be persecuted by people who thought they did God service. This is what happened. These men accused Stephen of blasphemy but they were the ones fighting God. Stephen was a faithful witness for the Lord Jesus Christ.

We need to prepare to give an answer for the hope we have in Jesus Christ. We need to study the word, think about our faith, and let the truth of Jesus sink deep in our spirit. Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He rose again on the third day. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved.

Stephen's Address – Acts Chapter 7

Stephen's Address – The Call of Abraham (Acts 7:1-8)

Stephen was arrested and brought before the religious court on false charges of blasphemy. He was allowed to defend himself. Rather than defending himself he preached the word and began his sermon with Abraham.

He recounted how God appeared to Abraham and told him to leave his own country and go to a land which God would show him. Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans and traveled to Canaan. While Abraham was alive he never inherited the land but God promised it to his descendants. He said his descendants would inherit the land.

God gave him this promise when Abraham did not yet have a son. He had no son but God promised him his descendants would inherit Canaan. The Lord showed Abraham his descendants would be in bondage four hundred years, and then God would judge the nation that held them in bondage. God would bring them out and they would return to the land. God gave Abraham a sign of the covenant he made with him. The sign of the land covenant was circumcision. Abraham had a son named Isaac who had a son named Jacob and Jacob had twelve sons who became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel.

This was the beginning of Stephen's address to the religious court. Why did Stephen recount history? One reason might be that he proved the accusations against him were false. He was not a blasphemer. He believed the same promises his brethren believed. Yet he also believed the promise God made to Eve that she would have a son who would bruise the head of the serpent. Jesus Christ is the seed of the woman. Stephen knew the truth and he used scripture everyone knew and understood to demonstrate this. He was not against them. He was on their side and on the side of history and their opposition of Jesus Christ was opposition against the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Here is a bible verse I always remember about Abraham. Romans 4:20, *"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;"*

When we believe the gospel, the testimony of God about his Son Jesus, then we bring glory to God.

Stephen's Address – Joseph Sold Into Egypt (Acts 7:9-14)

Stephen continued his sermon to the religious court. He described how the patriarchs betrayed their brother Joseph and sold him into slavery. God was with Joseph, though, and gave him favor and wisdom in Egypt. He rose from a prison cell to be the prince of Egypt and provided salvation for Egypt during a time of great famine. Not only did he save Egypt, but his family also came to him for food. Joseph moved his family to Egypt, and this fulfilled what God said to Abraham about his descendants being strangers in another nation for 400 years.

What did it take for God to move these twelve sons of Jacob into Egypt? It took years of suffering for Joseph. It took a worldwide famine where countless people suffered. And from the perspective of the Bible all this was to accomplish God's plan in bringing Israel into Egypt.

Sometimes we wonder why God allows suffering in the world. It is rare that we stop and consider that God has a great plan that he is accomplishing, and that he is able to use worldwide suffering in order to put his plan into motion and accomplish his purpose. God allowed suffering for his people, and for all the world, in order to accomplish a greater purpose of redemption and salvation. Is not every plague and famine allowed by God? It will accomplish God's purpose for which he allows it.

There is no greater demonstration of this than Calvary. At Calvary we see the greatest evil of mankind, and also we see the greatest demonstration of God's love, mercy, and grace for us. What men intended for evil God intended for good to bring about a great salvation. This is the story behind the account of Joseph. God causes all things to work together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28).

Give thanks in all things! God is in control. He will accomplish his purpose in our lives and his plan will be fulfilled. Trust in his goodness, trust in his love, trust in his faithfulness.

Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day. Call on the name of Jesus and be saved.

Stephen's Address: Israel Oppressed in Egypt (Acts 7:15-19)

Stephen continued his sermon with the history of Israel in Egypt. This same account can be found starting in Exodus chapter 1.

After Israel moved to Egypt they continued to multiply. Joseph and his generation died and a new generation in Egypt arose which did not remember Joseph. A new Pharaoh arose who did not know Joseph and he oppressed Israel with slave labor.

There was a specific time when God would fulfill his promise to Israel. This was according to the timeline God gave to Abraham. When the time of God's promise drew near Israel multiplied rapidly. This was one reason why Egypt dreaded the Hebrew people. They grew quickly and Pharaoh was afraid they would take over.

The devil's plan to stop Israel from becoming a nation was to kill the male babies. Killing children is a scheme of the devil. This is a plan the enemy uses today through abortion, euthanasia, and apathy toward the elderly.

There was a set time frame for these events to occur. The Lord would not allow his people to suffer forever. There was a season for the Hebrew people to suffer in Egypt. This season would not last forever.

The more they suffered the more they multiplied. We see this also in the early church and through history. When the church was persecuted they multiplied. Open persecution of God's people always had the opposite result of what the enemy intended. Oppression and persecution of God's people caused them to spread the word and bring more people to faith in Jesus. The more Israel was oppressed the more they multiplied. Pharaoh could not stop God's plan, and neither will Satan stop God's plan for the church in the last days.

Remember God's people were always hated by the world. Whether it be Israel or the church the Lord's people were always hated, persecuted, and killed by the world system. Why do Christians want to be friends with the world? They do not remember their history. Christians cannot be friends with the world or with apostate religious systems which pretend to be the church. True Christians were oppressed in the false religious system and driven out. Just as Israel was driven out of Egypt so also Christians who love Jesus with all their heart are cast out of the worldly religious system.

Do you feel oppressed by organized religious systems? Do you dread entering their buildings and sitting under their religious leaders every Sunday (or Saturday)? Perhaps the Lord is leading you out of religious Egypt into a new place where you can be fruitful and productive in God's kingdom.

Last thought: abortion is of the devil. Killing babies was inspired by Satan and those who participate in it will be judged by God just like God judged Egypt.

Humble yourselves, repent, and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved.

Stephen's Address: Birth and Adoption of Moses (Acts 7:20-22)

During this time of great distress for Israel their deliverer was born. He was cast out into the river like other babies, but he was rescued by an Egyptian princess. Going into the water and being brought up out of water is a picture of salvation. We are baptized into the Lord Jesus. Water baptism is a symbol of being buried with Christ and being raised together with him. Moses went into the water and he was brought out of the water into new life. The name of Moses was given to him by the Egyptians and means to be brought up out of the water.

This picture of baptism is repeated again in Moses' life when the nation of Israel went into the Red Sea and came out the other side into a new life. They were saved through the water.

This is the picture we see with Noah and the ark. We see this when Israel crossed the Jordan River under Joshua. This is the picture we see in the New Testament when John baptized men in the Jordan River.

God used this picture to remind us that the way to new life is dying to the old life. We cannot go back to the life we had before we were born again. We have a new life in Christ. Old things have passed away. All things have become new.

Moses received an education while he grew up in the house of Pharaoh. Like the apostle Paul Moses did not hold on to the life of worldly power, but he left it behind in order to be part of God's humble people. All of the education of Egypt could not compare with the fellowship of the saints. He left his old life to begin the new life. He had to be dead to Egypt in order to live with God's people.

People today seek knowledge in the world but it is in fellowship with God's people we find true wisdom and knowledge. The Lord Jesus is our wisdom and our knowledge. In him is all wisdom and knowledge. The fear of the Lord is the true beginning of wisdom and knowledge.

An education can be a good thing, and there are benefits to having an education, but nothing can compare with knowing the Lord Jesus. In Christ we have all we need for life and godliness. Paul said he counted all of his past achievements in education and religion as dung compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus the Lord.

Do you know him? Have you found the Lord Jesus to be wisdom and knowledge in your life? Begin today by humbling your heart, and putting your entire faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that we may live with him.

Stephen's Address: Rejection and Flight of Moses (Acts 7:23-29)

Stephen recounts that when Moses was forty years old he went to see his people. Perhaps he felt God's call on his life. However, as is often the case, when he felt God's call on his life he went about to do God's will in his own strength and wisdom.

When Moses visited his people he saw one of the Hebrews mistreated by an Egyptian. In retaliation Moses killed the Egyptian. Moses assumed the Hebrews would understand he was sent to be their deliverer but they did not understand.

The next day Moses attempted to come between two Hebrews who were arguing but they rejected his intervention. One of them asked Moses if he would kill him as he had killed the Egyptian. When Moses heard this he realized he was discovered and so he fled. He went to the land of Midian where he married a woman and had two sons.

Moses would become the deliverer of God's people, but he attempted to do this in his own strength what only God could accomplish. As a result, Moses' actions led to the death of one man and a rebuke from others. By attempting to perform God's will in his own strength Moses only brought suffering upon other people and also put himself in a dangerous position. This shows us how important it is to always wait upon the Lord and allow the Lord's work to be done in the Lord's way and also in the Lord's time.

Worldly education did not lend itself to giving Moses spiritual wisdom. Moses only knew carnal power and worldly intellectualism at this point in his life. We see the results of carnal power and the wisdom of the world. It leads to death, suffering, and being put on the back burner. In the beginning Moses was brave enough to confront and kill a man. But now he was running for his life. This is what happens when men of God strive to do God's will in their own strength or carnal power.

Bravado gets people killed. I see this so clearly in the church right now with this current plague and crisis. It is so important to stick with scripture, and wait upon the Lord, and humble ourselves. Our response should not be protesting, or taking political action. Our response should be humility, and prayer, and asking God to fill us with the Holy Spirit. We need God's wisdom so that we can do God's will, in God's way, and in God's timing.

Moses was rejected by his own people. This is a type of Christ. The Lord Jesus came to his own people but they did not receive him or understand that he was their deliverer. He came to his own but his own people did not receive him.

We can humble ourselves now, and receive the Lord Jesus as our Lord and Savior. He is our deliverer. He delivered us from self, sin, the world, and Satan when he died upon the cross. He was buried in a tomb and he rose from the dead on the third day. Call on the name of the Lord Jesus today and be saved.

Stephen's Address: Call of Moses (Acts 7:30-38)

Stephen told the account of how God called Moses to serve him. God spoke to Moses out of a burning bush. He called him to go back to Egypt and rescue the nation of Israel.

It was not Moses who rescued Israel but it was the Lord. However, the Lord used Moses as his spokesman. Moses was used by God for forty years in the wilderness with Israel. He was God's representative to Israel. The Lord used Moses to teach the people who God is and the name of the Lord and the words of God.

One thing Stephen underlines is the prophecy about how God would raise up a prophet for Israel who would be like Moses. This prophecy points forward to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Moses was a shadow of the Lord. He pointed forward to the coming of the Messiah. His life gives us pictures of the Lord Jesus when he appeared.

When God called Moses he spoke to him. Moses heard God speak to him. He received God's name, and he also heard, received, and believed the word which God spoke to him. The Lord speaks to us. Jesus said that his sheep hear his voice and follow him. (John 10:27)

The Lord uses men to accomplish his plan and purpose. It was God's plan to rescue the nation of Israel from Egypt. He called one man to accomplish this purpose.

The Lord does not need a lot of people to complete his goals. He can use one man, if he so desires. This flies in the face of how the world system thinks and operates. Men who are controlled by the thinking of the world always rely on many numbers of people to give them prestige, and position, and therefore

provision, protection, and portion. It is not like that with the Lord. God can accomplish everything with one man.

The Lord accomplished eternal salvation for us through the one man Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus was sent by God into this world to be our Savior and Lord. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. He was buried and he rose again from the dead on the third day. Through this one man God provided eternal salvation and life for all those who will believe in him.

The Lord still calls people today to follow him. He has a purpose, a plan, and a mission for each one of us to accomplish. You may not hear God speaking to you out of a burning bush but the Holy Spirit can still communicate to you today. The Lord still speaks. You can talk to the Lord and the Lord will talk to you. He speaks.

Read God's word. Pray and seek the Lord. The Bible promises us if we seek the Lord that we can find him.

Stephen's Address: Rebellion Of Israel (Acts 7:39-43)

Moses was God's man to lead Israel out of Egypt and to the promised land. He was God's man, performing God's will in God's way and at God's time but the people rejected his leadership. This was a statement about the rebellious nature of man. Unbelievers will not submit to a man of God. Instead, they turn to a god of their own understanding. They create their own gods to give them guidance. They desire to satisfy the lust of the flesh. What happened with Israel at this point is typical of those beginning a walk of faith. The way seems difficult and men are tempted to abandon the living God for a god of their own understanding. Men would rather have dead religion than the living God.

Egypt represented the world system. These men wanted to return to a system they understood. In that system, as terrible as it was, they understood how to get food, clothing, provision, and protection. In the wilderness with Moses they no longer knew how to live. They did not understand that God wanted them to walk by faith and trust in him for everything.

As a result of Israel's backsliding the Lord turned his back on his people. Stephen quoted the prophets and what happened to Israel when they rejected the living God and made a false god of their own understanding. What was Stephen's message? They made a false religion of their own understanding. They followed a man-made system of religion but rejected the true God in Jesus Christ.

People do this today. Men are religious because they yearn for guidance. Men sense their lostness and desire leadership or a principle by which they can guide their lives. Many settle for the worldly principles of self worship which exalt one's own name for provision and protection. They worship self and educate themselves in the philosophy and psychology of the world. They will take bits and pieces from various religions or self-help programs. They mix all this together and fashion their own golden calf which they can worship.

Men find it difficult to have faith and wait on God. Moses went up to talk to God, but Israel could not bear to wait for him to return. They insisted on taking matters into their own hands. They were unable to wait on the Lord. Instead, they returned in their heart to Egypt which is the world system. As a result,

God turned his back on them. When God turns his back then all of what is good in life disappears. All that is good in life comes from God. When he turns his back all will go sour very quickly.

Humble yourself today, believe the gospel, and call on the name of Jesus Christ. Everyone who calls on the name of Jesus will be saved.

Stephen's Address: Tabernacle of the Testimony (Acts 7:44-47)

Stephen here covered the part of Israel's history in which they built a tabernacle to keep the ark of God's covenant, and also how it was transported from one location to another until the time of David and Solomon. Stephen underlined the fact that this tabernacle was constructed exactly according to a pattern which was given to Moses by God.

This same idea about the construction of the tabernacle is also mentioned in Hebrews 8:5, *"Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount."*

God does not change, and so men must conform to God's pattern. God revealed himself to us through his son Jesus Christ. There is no other revelation of God that is higher than the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the express image and revelation of God. Jesus said that he and the Father were one. When we see Jesus we see the Father. This is why there is no other way to know God except through Jesus Christ. Everything else that pretends to reveal God to men is smoke and mirrors compared to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The idea of an exact pattern which God revealed to Moses showed us that God is absolute and unchanging. God does not conform to men. Men must conform themselves to God and his word. If we are to escape the punishment of our sins then it must be according to God's revealed pattern of salvation. There is no salvation in any other way except by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. No matter what problem we have in life it originates in Adam's sin, our sin, or in the sins of other people which affect us. The problem is always sin. Sin is the root and foundation of all your problems. What is the answer to this sin problem? It is Jesus Christ. The answer is Jesus Christ. There is no other answer.

God did not give Moses a plan B type of pattern. There was only one pattern. Moses could not improvise on the construction of this tabernacle. It had to be done God's way, with God's materials, and with God's pattern. There is only way to serve the Lord. We must serve God by putting our faith in Jesus Christ. He is the pattern. He is the ultimate fulfillment of the tabernacle which God gave to Moses. The Lord Jesus fulfilled everything in that tabernacle. He was that tabernacle. The Lord is our home.

Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Stephen's Address: Heaven Is My Throne (Acts 7:48-53)

Stephen continued his address to the religious court. In his recount of the history of Israel he came to the part where David wanted to build a temple for the Lord. He did not have the opportunity to build the temple but Solomon his son did build the temple.

We know from the New Testament (John 4) when Jesus spoke to the woman at the well that God looks for those who worship him in spirit and in truth. We are not tied down to a specific geographical location when we worship God. We can serve God in any place. Jesus said where two or three are gathered together in his name that he is in the midst of them. In the New Testament it is the people of God who are now the temple of God. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

How does this affect the Christian church? People are determined to make a man-made building into the church. There is nothing wrong with having a building to meet together, but it is human nature to put more emphasis on the building itself rather than the people. It is easier to focus on the organization of the church, the finances, and the building rather than on the people who actually make up the church.

What can we do about this? We should focus on people rather than on building programs. We need to invest into what will truly last for eternity. All of the church buildings will eventually fall into ruin. But the souls of men endure. We need to invest into what will truly count for eternity.

Stephen's point was that no man-made temple could contain the Lord. The Lord cannot be contained by man-made systems, or buildings.

Stephen concluded his sermon by rebuking those who judged him. He told them that their ancestors killed the prophets and the ones who prophesied of the Messiah. They arrested Stephen in order to convict him of a crime but instead those who arrested Stephen were revealed as the true criminals. They were just like their ancestors who persecuted and killed the prophets.

Throughout Stephen's sermon he did not compromise. He showed them their own history and how everything in the Old Testament led to the Lord Jesus Christ. However, they already had made up their mind to reject the Messiah. They would not accept the testimony of Stephen. Stephen knew it and he knew he had this one last opportunity to be a witness for Jesus.

May the Lord help us to be as earnest and faithful in our witness for the Lord.

Stephen's Address: The Stoning Of Stephen (Acts 7:54-59)

Stephen prayed to God for the forgiveness of those who killed him. Stephen was controlled by the Holy Spirit. His statement at death was nearly the same as the words Jesus said on the cross. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Stephen prayed God would forgive those who sinned against him. This is in the Lord's example prayer he gave to his disciples. "Forgive us our debts, even as we forgive those who are indebted to us." Forgiveness is a bedrock character trait of a man filled with the Holy Spirit. We forgive others because the Lord Jesus died for our sins. How can we not forgive men their sins? It is God's will for us to forgive and bless those who curse us and pray for those who hurt us. Stephen walked in the Spirit.

We are introduced to a new man here. Saul of Tarsus, a man who persecuted the church and approved of the killing of Stephen, would go on to occupy most of the book of Acts as one of the greatest apostles of the Lord Jesus.

Stephen saw an open heaven. It was not enough that he rebuked them for their sins but then his proclamation of an open heaven sealed his fate. Religious people are opposed to an open heaven. Religion seeks to control men with rules, law, and traditions. The Holy Spirit sets us free so we can have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit we have an open heaven. We have direct access to the throne of God's grace and can come to God with confidence.

Their murder of Stephen was rejection of the only one who could save them from their sins. They were consistent in rejecting God's message of good news through Jesus Christ. Their prestige meant more to them than approval by God. The Lord Jesus stood up to welcome Stephen home. They took Stephen out and stoned him to death. The scripture says he fell asleep. This is the way the New Testament described the death of the saints. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.

Why was Stephen willing to die for Jesus? Because Jesus is God, and he walked on this earth, and he gave his life upon Calvary for us. Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day.

The Lord rewards those who are faithful until the end. Not every Christian lives a comfortable life. Many gave their lives for the Lord while serving him, especially in countries that are controlled by Islam and Communism. We should pray for these people. We pray God would open their eyes to the good news of Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus died for their sins, and he is willing to forgive anyone who turns to him in humility. Everyone who calls on the name of Jesus will be saved.

Gospel Went To The World – Acts Chapter 8

Saul Persecuted the Church (Acts 8:1-8)

After Stephen's death a wave of persecution broke out against the church. Saul was right in the middle of it. He went from house to house and dragged people off to jail.

As a result Christians scattered from Jerusalem and we see the pattern emerge which Jesus prophesied. The gospel started in Jerusalem and spread from Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. This was the path the gospel of Jesus Christ took.

Why didn't Christians take the initiative to spread out with the gospel? Why did it take persecution for Christians to go forward into other places? Most people, even sincere Christians, desire stability. They want to live in peace with a home and a family and go about their daily lives. It took pressure from the outside to get people moving in the right direction. Saul's persecution provided this pressure. His persecution fanned the flames of the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem into other places. It went from being a Jewish sect and spread quickly to Gentile areas also.

What did it take for the twelve sons of Israel to move their families to Egypt? It took the suffering of their brother Joseph plus a world wide famine that lasted seven years in order to move the twelve sons of Israel from Canaan to Egypt.

God speaks and tells people what to do and what will happen. He also takes us by the hand and makes sure we arrive at the intended destination. I'm so glad God does not leave it up to us to accomplish his plan. He works with us, through us, and many times in spite of us to accomplish his will and get us where we need to be in life.

Persecution is not abnormal for Christians. This has happened since the beginning with Cain and Abel. There was never a time in history when the carnal man did not persecute and kill the spiritual man. Those who walk by faith were always persecuted by those who walked in the flesh. Jesus was persecuted and he said in the same way the world persecuted him it also persecuted those who followed him. The servant is not greater than his master. Since Jesus was treated like this we also are treated like this. The enemy does not take prisoners in this war. He will stir up those he controls to do everything he can to destroy the spiritual man. See Ephesians 6. It is not the man himself who is our enemy but the evil spirit who controls that man.

The most dangerous people are those who persecute and kill other people in the name of God. Religions that teach men to kill, or hate, or persecute are inspired by the devil. Jesus said it would happen.

Philip In Samaria (Acts 8:4-8)

This was the Philip who was also known as Philip the Evangelist. This was not the Philip who was one of the Lord's twelve apostles, even though he was known in a broader sense of those apostles beyond the original twelve. I make this distinction because the Lord used this man in supernatural ways. He did sign miracles including driving out devils and preaching the gospel. He was used by the Lord to lead the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ. He was also raptured away by the Spirit to another location after he baptized the eunuch.

I say all this to point out the fact that it was not just the original apostles whom God used to do miracles and signs and wonders. Even lowly deacons and evangelists were used by God in performing supernatural signs and wonders.

The important part of these scriptures which I would underline is how people were getting saved. The persecution that arose after Stephen's death drove the Christians into different areas and everywhere they went they preached the gospel. They proclaimed the Lord Jesus Christ.

As a result of the gospel great joy came to the places where Philip preached. People were saved, healed, and set free. Joy accompanied the proclamation of the gospel when it was preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. The gospel preached by someone anointed by God will bring deliverance and joy to people.

Everywhere we go we should be ready to share our faith. Opportunities abound for sharing God's word with people.

Simon The Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-25)

Simon was an example of someone trying to use money to purchase influence in the church. This story reminds me of Ananias and Sapphira and makes me wonder why they died but this man was not struck dead immediately by the Holy Spirit. My guess was that Simon was ignorant and God had mercy on him. This man and also the example of Ananias and Sapphira seem to expose the same kind of sin. They were trying to use money in order to gain leverage or power within the church. How often do we see this kind of sin in the church today?

There was a reason Jesus said do not let your right hand know what your left hand does. There was a reason why people should not let others know what they did with their money. When people use money to draw attention to themselves they act on the principle of the world. What is this principle? It is the principle of self worship. It is not worship of God. It is worship of self. It is the water which springs from the fountain of unbelief and pride.

The human race is infected with this disease of self worship. Anywhere people reject Jesus we will find self worship. Self worship was expressed in ancient times through idols or tokens made out of gold or silver. Today it is seen in technology, self-help programs, and self promotion of every kind. Most of what is on social media is unfettered self promotion and self worship.

People today who are self worshipers are still attracted to tokens, jewelry, and adorning themselves. Remember Peter warned us about adorning ourselves. Why? What is the big deal? It is an expression of self worship. It is a heart of self love which adorns one's self with trinkets, tattoos, and other outward adornment.

I'm not a clothes line preacher, and I don't preach against women wearing make up. But can you tell when someone goes beyond looking presentable to trying to attract attention?

When you see men wearing multiple rings, and earrings, and carrying tokens around their neck you can safely assume they have a problem with vanity and self worship. Men who are covered with tattoos are self worshipers, unless they got the tattoo before they were saved. But I've seen pastors who were saved for years getting new tattoos. This is vanity, pride, and self worship in the pulpit. These men are under some kind of spell or delusion. Get away from them.

We don't really know what happened to this man Simon. Perhaps he was a true believer but just ignorant. We don't know. I've heard some preachers say this man was a false convert but I'm not so sure. The scripture says he believed. I've seen a lot of new Christians who were more ignorant than this man, but they were still saved. God has mercy upon people who do not know the truth, as long as they are willing to humble themselves and be corrected. This man was willing to humble himself when Peter rebuked him.

God knows the heart. The most important thing is not so much what we don't know but are we willing to be corrected? When the Lord points out something in our life are we willing to receive a word from the Lord? My hope and prayer in my own life is that I will always be ready to hear and receive correction from the Lord. There is no hope without God's correction in our lives. We are totally blind if the Lord does not show us our problems. We will never see it on our own without God's help.

May the Lord shine his light on us today and deliver us from all ignorance, delusion, and deceit. May the Holy Spirit search our lives and set us free from every lie. Amen.

Philip And The Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40)

By the command of an angel and the direction of the Holy Spirit Philip had an opportunity to witness to the Ethiopian. He shared the gospel with him, led him to Jesus, and also had a chance to baptize him. After he baptized the man Philip was raptured out to another location. A lot happened in these verses.

God set up this divine appointment. God knew that the man searched for him. When a man searches for God he can find him. The Lord will send someone to preach the gospel to a man who sincerely searches for truth. If anyone really wants to know the Lord then God will reveal himself to him.

The Ethiopian had a copy of the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He read a scripture which was a prophecy about Jesus Christ. This was a perfect scripture for Philip to use to preach the Lord Jesus Christ to this man. No doubt Philip told him that Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day, according to the scriptures.

This is a good scripture to use in our evangelism to people. We see a pattern of how the early disciples constantly used bible prophecy to preach to people about the Lord Jesus Christ. We should try to imitate this pattern and use bible prophecy to prove that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and God's Son. By using scripture like this we are following the example of Philip.

What other scriptures can you think of in the Old Testament that prove that Jesus Christ is the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of mankind?

Jesus Confronts Saul – Acts Chapter 9

The Road To Damascus (Acts 9:1-9)

Saul went to Damascus to capture Christians and put them in jail. On the way to Damascus he was stopped by the Lord Jesus. The Lord shone a bright light around him and his companions and spoke directly to Saul. It is interesting that the God of Israel speaks to Saul but Saul did not know who he was. He asked, "Who are you?" The Lord Jesus told him that he was Jesus whom Saul persecuted. After the Lord revealed himself to Saul he told him to go into the city where he would receive further instructions. His companions led him into the city because Saul was now blind. He did not eat or drink for three days.

The Lord is able to stop people in their tracks. Why doesn't he always do this? Why doesn't he stop people from carrying out evil deeds? This situation was specific. God had a calling on Saul's life. We don't know if the Lord stopped Saul because of what he was about to do, or because it was time for his life to change and for him to become an apostle of Jesus Christ. Fortunately the Lord did intervene before more Christians in Damascus were persecuted.

The Lord knew his name. The Lord called Saul by his name. Saul heard the voice of the Lord. Here was a man who at the time was not a believer in Jesus but the Lord Jesus spoke to him, and stopped him, and turned his life in a completely different direction. The Lord is able to intervene in our lives. If

God can help turn this man in the right direction he can turn anyone in the right direction. How much more if you pray and ask God for guidance will he provide. The Lord will provide direction, guidance, and understanding. The Bible exhorts us to ask God for wisdom in our lives. The Lord will provide wisdom and understanding. The Lord gave Saul understanding of who God is, and who Saul was. Saul was a persecutor and injurious man. But the Lord stopped him. God granted him repentance that he would come to the truth in Jesus and be saved from the snare of the devil.

This was an important turning point in the book of Acts. As we continue the account centers more on Paul's ministry, but we still have some more about Peter and other people in the church as well.

The Lord is able to save the worst sinners. God is able to interrupt the lives of people and turn them around. Saul was an example of someone God saved by his grace. Even Paul came to realize this about himself. He was an example of someone who was saved from the worst possible sins. If God could save Saul then God could save anybody. He was an example of God's grace and mercy to the worst sinners.

Don't ever believe you are beyond God's mercy and forgiveness. Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again from the dead on the third day. Call on the name of Jesus and be saved today.

Ananias Baptized Saul (Acts 9:10-19)

The Lord spoke clearly to Ananias and gave him instructions on where to go and what to do in regard to Saul of Tarsus. It is interesting how clear this word from the Lord was. It was not a vague impression or feeling. He received a street address from the Lord. Does the Lord speak this clearly to people today? I believe he does.

Ananias was not one of the twelve apostles. He was not an evangelist, deacon, or apostle. He was a nobody as far as we know. But he loved the Lord and he obeyed the Lord's command to him. Jesus told him to go lay hands on Saul, pray for him, and he would receive his sight. The Lord said he wanted to show Saul what things he would suffer for the sake of Jesus.

The Lord speaks! We see clearly the Lord spoke to Saul and revealed to him his name, Jesus of Nazareth. He spoke clearly to Ananias and told him where Saul was located and told him what to do. Ananias obeyed the Lord and Saul was healed from his blindness. He was baptized and ate some food to recover his strength.

What lessons can we learn from this? The Lord can speak to us. He can tell us what needs to be done. He can show us what he wants us to do. The Lord also heals us today. He used Ananias to heal Saul from his blindness. Why does the Lord use people like this? Why didn't he just heal Saul himself? I believe it is because the Lord wants us to work with him and participate in his plan with him. He invites us to be a part of his plan and purpose in the world.

The greatest joy I ever had in my life was working with the Lord and serving other people. There is no greater joy than serving the Lord and obeying his word for your life.

Saul Preached At Damascus (Acts 9:20-22)

Saul immediately started preaching that Jesus is the Christ in the local Jewish synagogues. The people who heard him were astounded by his preaching. They knew he persecuted Christians in Jerusalem and that he came to Damascus to do the same. What happened to him? He got saved! That's what happened!

His life was immediately transformed by the Lord Jesus. He did not wait but immediately started to witness to others the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord.

When Jesus touched people in the New Testament it resulted in immediate evangelism. Every time Jesus healed someone they told other people. When the woman at the well understood who Jesus was she immediately told her village. When Jesus saved someone they told others the good news. This is one of the signs of genuine salvation. When a person is born again they overflow with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives a person boldness to share God's word.

Saul continued to grow in strength. The more he preached the stronger his faith grew. The same is true for us. When we share our faith it makes us stronger, even when people reject our message and testimony. It makes us stronger spiritually. As we give to others we find the Lord gives more of the Holy Spirit to us.

A born again Christian has a desire for people to be saved. He will witness, teach, preach, and share God's word. He will let others know that Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day, according to the scriptures.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved.

The Escape From Damascus (Acts 9:23-25)

Saul's testimony was so powerful the Jews decided they wanted to kill him in order to shut him up. Saul learned of their plot, and his disciples helped him escape by lowering him in a basket through a window over the wall. This was the beginning of a long journey for Saul. He would preach until he was persecuted or thrown into jail. He would leave one town, and move on to the next town. His entire life mission was preaching the gospel, and even when people rejected the message he did not stop. He would just move on to another location and continue to preach the gospel. In this way many churches were born throughout the world.

What obstacles stop us from preaching the gospel? When are we ready to leave the ministry and give up? When do we get weary and turn our back on sharing the gospel? I've seen people give up and throw in the towel. I've seen people who turned their back on the ministry. I've seen pastors get tired and quit. What did Saul have we don't have today? I think it is simple. He heard the Lord's voice. He knew Jesus gave him a job to do. I think most people who quit serving God were never convinced God called them in the first place. They joined the ministry as a career, or because they had nothing else to do, or perhaps thought it would be an easy way to live. Then they found out how hard it was to work in this field where men are stirred up by the devil to persecute you, slander you, gossip about you, and bite your hand when you try to feed them.

This is the kind of work no one appreciates, even other Christians. It is a work no one thanks you for, no one believes in, and no one thinks has any value. So how do you keep going? You remember God spoke to you. You remember he called you by name and set you apart to serve him. This is what keeps you going. You heard God speak to you. He called you by name. He revealed himself to you. It is now your work to tell others about Jesus. It is now your work to lift up the name of Jesus.

Don't give up! Do not get weary in the work of the Lord. Let us be steadfast and unmovable, abounding in the work of the Lord. We know our labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Saul In Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-30)

After Saul escaped from Damascus he went to Jerusalem but the Christians did not trust him.

However, one man took a chance to help Saul. This man was Barnabas and he provided a human bridge from where Saul was to connect him to the other Christians in Jerusalem. This is a gift from the Lord. Barnabas exercised a gift that is truly needed in the church. He acted like glue to bring people together and help make peace.

Saul continued to preach in Jerusalem until people were ready to kill him. Now he had to escape for his life from Jerusalem as he did in Damascus. This pattern in Saul's life and ministry is repeated throughout the book of Acts.

Now that Saul was a Christian there was peace in the church for a time. The church continued to multiply and people walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

This phrase always stands out to me. It reminds me of parents. Children live in reverence of their father and are nourished by their mother.

This is how God is in our life. He is a parent who admonishes us to live in reverence and also comforts us with words of encouragement.

This is the purpose of preaching in the church. The purpose of prophecy is to build, encourage, and comfort God's people.

Where Saul went his testimony and preaching caused a divide among people. People either got saved or they wanted to kill him. There was no middle ground with this preacher. There was no middle ground with the Lord Jesus. Men who are filled with the Holy Spirit do not leave any middle ground for those they preach to. We are either on the Lord's side or we are on the devil's side. There is no in-between ground.

Repent of compromise and believe the gospel. Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand. The Lord Jesus gave his life for us upon Calvary. He died and he rose again on the third day. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved.

The Healing Of Aeneas (Acts 9:31-35)

After tracking Saul's history for a while the narrative returns again to Peter's account. Peter continued to be used by the Lord to heal people.

A man by the name of Aeneas was afflicted with palsy. Through Peter's ministry this man was healed by the Lord Jesus Christ. As a result, many people believed in the Lord and were saved.

As we look at each one of these accounts of divine healing we see a pattern emerging. In each case, people were brought to the Lord and saved. We can conclude that healing is not only for the benefit of the individual but also for the purpose of lifting up the name of Jesus Christ so that people can be saved. Physical healing is wonderful, but salvation of the soul has eternal value to us.

Divine healing is still for us today. God still heals people and uses it to bring people to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. By his stripes we are healed.

Psalm 103:2-3, *"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;"*

The Lord heals us, and he also forgives us all of our sins. Salvation and healing go hand in hand.

Don't be one of those Christians who rejects the reality of divine healing today. Healing and salvation go hand in hand throughout the Bible.

The Raising Of Dorcas (Acts 9:36-43)

Dorcas and Tabitha are the same person. Peter called this woman Tabitha. She was known for her good works, but she fell sick, and she died.

The people who knew her called in Peter to do something about this. Obviously the work of this woman was highly valued and she was necessary in her community. Her family and friends wanted her back.

The incredible thing about this account is that God agreed with them. Through Peter's ministry, the Lord healed and raised this woman from the dead. Peter prayed, simply said "Tabitha, rise", and just like Jesus with the little girl Tabitha rose from the dead.

As a result, many heard about this, and many believed in the Lord.

This miracle benefited that community, and magnified the name of the Lord Jesus, and many people were saved as a result.

We see a definite pattern in the Bible of God raising people from the dead. This happened in the Old and New Testament. The Lord reigns even over death itself. The Lord raised people from the dead during his ministry, he himself rose from the dead, and the apostles were used by God to raise people from the dead.

Death is an enemy. It should never be longed for or wished for by any Christians. It is an enemy. We should always live our life to the fullest in God's will. Always be determined to live and not die. When death comes for the believer it is only a doorway into a greater life that God has planned for us. There is no real death for those who live and believe in Jesus.

Jesus is risen from the dead. He is at the right hand of God the Father. He lives forever and makes intercession for us. He is able to save to the utmost those who come to God through him. Call on the name of Jesus and be saved today.

The Gospel For Gentiles – Acts Chapter 10

Cornelius Sent For Peter (Acts 10:1-8)

An angel of the Lord appeared to Cornelius. This man was a Centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment in Caesarea. He was a religious and devout man who prayed to the God of Israel and gave to the poor. His prayers and gifts to the poor ascended to God as a memorial offering. What is a memorial offering? God heard this man's prayers. He knew to pray to the God of Israel and his prayers were heard. God sent this angel to give him direction on how he could be saved by faith in Jesus Christ. The angel told him to send for the apostle Peter. Cornelius sent two of his servants and a devout soldier to go and find the apostle Peter.

A memorial offering can be seen as an offering that brings God's attention upon an individual. It can also be seen as reminding us of God's attention that is upon us. Either way, the Lord's eyes were upon this Gentile and his ears were open to his cry.

This account of Cornelius is a way to understand how all men are accountable to God. Any man in any location on earth, even without a Bible or the gospel, can reach God if they truly seek him. If men seek the truth of God then the Lord will make a way for them to understand more and more of who he is. If he does not send an angel and there is no preacher available then the Lord can reveal himself to people through visions and dreams. I've heard testimonies of how this happened to people who lived in remote parts of the world.

The Lord knew the heart of this man. Even though he was a Gentile and largely ignorant of the gospel he knew enough to seek God. He gave to the poor. He prayed to the God of Israel. He knew enough and his heart was right with the Lord. God made a way for him to get further information which would bring him to complete salvation and also his entire household.

This account also showed us that it was God's will to use men to preach the gospel. Surely the angel could have preached the good news to Cornelius, but it was the Lord's will to send for Peter and have him preach the gospel to the household of Cornelius. Why does God choose men in this fashion? It is because he wants us to participate with him in his eternal plan and his eternal kingdom. It is his desire for us to participate in what he does.

To be a part of God's plan starts with simple faith in Jesus Christ. Anyone can call upon the name of the Lord. Even a child can call on the name of Jesus and be saved.

Peter's Vision (Acts 10:9-16)

Before the men Cornelius sent reached Peter the Lord was at work preparing Peter's heart to receive them. Peter was on the roof of his house to pray when he saw a vision from the Lord. The vision was a sheet let down from heaven filled with various types of animals, clean and unclean, which the Lord told him to kill and eat. However, Peter protested saying he never ate anything which was unclean. The Lord corrected him and said that anything which the Lord said was clean was clean. God's word cleanses. God's word makes us clean.

If we remember, also, during the earthly ministry of the Lord he pronounced all foods clean as well. The point in this context was that God prepared Peter's heart to understand that God can save a Gentile by faith as well as the Jew. However, the topic of food was also important to remember, too. Christians are not under any kind of dietary laws. In fact, those who try to bring Christians under dietary laws take away from the gospel of grace. We should never add or take away from the gospel of grace. It is by grace we are saved, it is by grace we are kept, it is by grace we are sanctified and made holy. Observing days, or rules about food, only brings people into spiritual darkness and bondage.

God prepared Peter. The Lord understood Peter's background, culture, and upbringing in the Jewish religion of his day. The Lord knew Peter needed divine intervention in order for him to be willing to accept Gentiles as brothers in Christ. This was a lesson the entire early church had issues on which we will see. It was one of the biggest hurdles the early church faced. How do Gentiles fit in with this Jewish Messiah?

The Lord communicates to people through visions and dreams. He does this today. God will use any means he wants in order to communicate with people. Do not limit God's ability to speak to people in whatever way he chooses.

Peter Called to Caesarea (Acts 10:17-23)

The three men sent by Cornelius arrived at Peter's house. When they arrived Peter was on the roof of the house in prayer. The Lord spoke to Peter and told him that three men arrived and that he sent them. He told Peter to go with the men. Peter went down to greet the men and asked them what they wanted. These men told Peter about Cornelius and the angel and their request. Peter invited them into the house, and the next day they all set out to go to the house of Cornelius.

What did it take to get the early church to bring in people who were not Jews? It took God working on both ends with Cornelius and also on Peter's end by showing him through a vision and speaking directly to him about these three men. The Lord continued his work of building the church. These men had little idea of what God did through their lives. They were led by the Lord one day at a time, and a little bit at a time the Lord revealed to him his plan for the church.

Peter would later be known as the apostle to the Jewish people and Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. But here God used Peter to reach the Gentile people. Peter was already a leader in the church, and as a leader he would set an example for others. As we shall see later Peter's trip to the house of a Gentile raised a lot of questions for the church. Peter was brought in to defend his actions before the church.

He needed to have a word from the Lord to do this and he had it. The Lord spoke to him and gave him specific instructions. The Lord not only spoke to him, but also confirmed his word by speaking to Cornelius through an angel and sending for him. The Lord will lead us without any mistake. If we will seek the Lord he will give us clear directions for our life and what he would have for us to do.

Don't be concerned if things do not seem clear in your life. Live each day for the Lord. Live in obedience to what you know from his word. Do what he puts in front of you. Be faithful with what he gives to you. Whatever you do, work at it with all of your heart as unto the Lord.

The Lord promises he will instruct us and teach us in the way we should go. Psalm 32:8, *"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye."*

Peter Visited Cornelius (Acts 10:24-33)

Peter arrived at Caesarea where Cornelius waited with his family and friends. Cornelius was overwhelmed and fell down at Peter's feet but Peter admonished him to get up. Peter told him he was just a man. This is an important point to remember. Peter did not exalt himself. He did not make a name for himself. He was there in obedience to the Holy Spirit and to make the name of Jesus Christ great and glorious.

Peter told them it was unlawful for a Jew to come into the house of Gentile in this manner. However, he shared with them that God had taught him to not call any man unclean that God had accepted. He was referring back to the vision of the sheet. So, we understand from Peter's interpretation that he understood that Gentiles could be saved as well as Jews. God does not show favoritism, but accepts people from all nations who believe in him.

Peter asked him why he was sent for, and again Cornelius told the story about the appearance of the angel and the instructions he received regarding Peter. This meeting was at God's divine guidance and direction.

Cornelius thanked him for coming to them and told Peter they were ready to hear everything which God put on his heart to tell them. Cornelius, his family, and his friends were ready to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This shows us, again, that when people seek after the Lord with all of their hearts he can be found. God will reveal himself to any person who seeks him in honesty and truth. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

The Lord teaches us through this passage that we cannot judge people by their ethnic background or their culture or where they come from. God will accept any man who comes to him in humility and faith. Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved. There are many people from all different nations who are in heaven. This is something which John saw and described in the book of Revelation.

Christians should never, never allow any racism or prejudice in our hearts. This is a problem in today's world and Satan fans the flames of hatred and violence because of the roots of this sin in America. May God have mercy on us, and heal us, and deliver us from this curse in America.

Good News For Gentiles (Acts 10:34-43)

Peter's proclamation of the gospel got right to the point and to the heart of the message that brings salvation.

Peter reminded them that they all knew of current events in that region. They all heard about John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus. They knew he went around doing good, healing people, and driving out the devil. Peter confirmed that this very same Jesus was the Lord of all, and that he was crucified on a cross, he died, but he rose again from the dead on the third day.

Peter told them that he and the other apostles were personal eyewitnesses of these things. It was through the Lord Jesus and faith in his name that men receive forgiveness of sins.

What are the important points here to remember?

The life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ were all observed by men who lived with him, ate food with him, listened to him, and walked down the road with him. Jesus is a real person. He healed people, drove out the devil, and proclaimed the gospel to the poor. He died on a cross for our sins. He was buried in a tomb. He rose from the dead on the third day. Through faith in the name of Jesus men receive forgiveness of their sins.

Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, but he also died for all men. God does not show any favoritism. The Holy Bible teaches us that all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. God will justify and cleanse any man if we will believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the way, and the truth, and the life. He is the only way to God. He is the only way we can receive forgiveness of our sins.

Gentiles Received The Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-48)

While Peter still spoke to the people the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the message. The people immediately heard, believed, and received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. How did the Jewish people who were with Peter know that the Gentiles were saved and accepted by God? They heard them speaking in tongues. This should cause us to pause and think. Reject modern doctrine which rejects the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. This Pentecostal doctrine of speaking in tongues is on display here as evidence that these men were saved. Remember this!

Does everyone have to speak in tongues to be saved? Later Paul taught about this and he said that not everyone has the gift of speaking in tongues. But if you do not have this gift do not try to say that no one else can have it. Denominations who teach that speaking in tongues is not for today are guilty of forbidding people from speaking in tongues. 1 Corinthians 14:39, "Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues."

When a preacher says that speaking in tongues is not for today he is in effect forbidding people to speak with tongues. Don't be guilty of this. Even if you do not believe in it, do not forbid it, and do not preach against it. The scripture is plain. Forbid not to speak with tongues.

This was a turning point for the church. It would soon become official that not only were Jews meant to be saved, but also Gentiles were saved. The same spiritual gifts given to the Jewish church were also poured out upon Gentiles who heard the gospel, believed, and received God's free gift of salvation.

Christians – Acts Chapter 11

Peter's Report at Jerusalem (Acts 11:1-18)

When Peter returned to Jerusalem he was called in by Jewish people in the church to give an account why he went into a Gentiles' house and ate food with them. From this we can clearly see that people did not understand the Lord's plan to save not only Israel but also the entire world through his work at Calvary in his death, burial, and resurrection. We may find it hard to understand today this lack of understanding of God's will for all men to be saved but in those days they believed that only those in Israel were God's chosen people. Anyone outside of Israel was not one of God's people. Of course, this was a misunderstanding, because even in the Old Testament we see Gentile people were grafted into God's chosen people. Examples include Rahab the harlot during the time of Joshua, and also the Moabite woman Ruth who became the ancestor of King David.

Peter carefully retold all of the details surrounding this event, including his vision, the Lord speaking to him, and how the Gentiles were baptized in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues just like the Jewish believers. From this testimony the Jewish people in the church realized Gentiles were saved also. Remember, the evidence that convinced these Jews that Gentiles were accepted by God was the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the fact that Gentiles spoke in tongues when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Another thought about this I had was the fact that Peter allowed himself to be interrogated in this manner. Did they not know who Peter was? Couldn't Peter do whatever he wanted and people were just expected to accept it and fall in line? After all, when Peter walked through town people were healed by just his passing shadow. How dare these people call into question what Peter did? Didn't God use Peter to raise the dead? And heal the lame man? Wasn't he one of the original 12 apostles of Jesus Christ and an eyewitness of the transfiguration? Yes, all that is true. But it did not matter. It did not make Peter above other Christians. It did not mean he could exalt himself over other people. His experience, his gift, his calling, and his time with the Lord did not mean he was above anyone else.

We need to get this through our head! These early Christians showed us that there were no "leaders" of the church in the same way we think of "leaders" today. Our concept of leadership today is tainted by the corporate business world and by politics. This is not the kind of leadership that Jesus showed these people. Jesus taught them by word and example that a leader was someone who served other people.

Peter patiently explained his actions, and appealed to these people on the basis of the facts. He did not try to demand his rights or exert any kind of apostolic authority over these people. Instead, he appealed to them with facts, and also with the truth of what he saw and witnessed. It was up to those people to hear, receive, and believe what Peter said.

I have not seen this myself very often. Leadership that was modeled in front of me has usually consisted of men who exalt themselves and who assert their authority aggressively over other people.

This is because many Christian "leaders" are brainwashed by what they see in the world. Their model of leadership is not based on the Bible but it is based on their own natural instinct and what they consider as "normal" from what they observe in the world.

Peter was not like this. He followed the example of the Lord Jesus and humbled himself before these brothers in order to win them over to the truth.

The Church at Antioch (Acts 11:19-30)

After the disciples of the Lord were scattered throughout the region they preached mainly to the Jewish people about Jesus. However, there were some who preached the Lord Jesus to Gentile people. As a result, Gentiles were saved and the church grew in places like Antioch. It was Antioch where these early disciples were first known as Christians.

The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch to find out what happened. He was glad by what he saw. It was evident to him that the Lord did this work among the Gentiles. He encouraged them to be steady in their faith in the Lord and to continue to grow in the Lord. Barnabas saw a great need for bible teaching so he got Saul from Tarsus and brought him to Antioch to help with this new church. As we shall see going forward the record in the book of Acts from this point focuses more on Paul's ministry to the Gentiles.

A footnote here at the end of this chapter included information that prophets foretold a worldwide famine. As a result of their prophetic ministry the Christians organized and sent help to other parts of the church in different areas. These were examples of relief organizations. Acts recorded that the relief was sent by the hands of Saul and Barnabas.

What can we learn from this section? The Lord is not restricted by ethnic groups. He reaches people from all nations and all cultures. The Lord Jesus died on the cross for the whole world. The Lord burdens certain men in ministry to go to unreached people groups. The outreach to the Jewish people was already well established. Now the Lord raised up men such as Barnabas and Saul to reach the Gentiles with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I think it is an interesting note that the Bible included here that the disciples of Jesus were first called Christians at Antioch. I always wonder why people want to identify themselves as "Christ follower" or "disciple" when the Bible itself provided us with what disciples of Jesus or Christ followers are actually called. We are Christians! Why attempt to identify as something else? I assume many people do this because they try to be culturally or politically sensitive. However, I think Christians should still be proud to identify themselves as Christians. I am in Christ. I am a Christian. Amen.

The Fairness Of God – Acts Chapter 12

James Killed, Peter Imprisoned (Acts 12:1-4)

Up until this point persecution against the church came mainly through the religious leaders who opposed Jesus, betrayed him to Pilate, and the religious leaders who persecuted the apostles and early church. Now, we see the Gentile world government took notice of the church and joined in persecuting the church. These are the two groups which always attack God's people. False religion and secular

government join hands to persecute true Christians. This is the pattern through all of history and continues to this day.

Herod captured the apostle James, the brother of John, and had him put to death with the sword. This probably meant he was beheaded in a similar fashion as John the Baptist. Already we see one of the original twelve apostles now lost his life in service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Herod saw the murder of James made the religious leaders happy he also arrested Peter and put him in prison. Peter did not meet the same fate as James but was let out of prison by the Lord. This contrast between one apostle who died and another who was delivered is an interesting contrast. It raises the question of why does one die and another live?

At the root of this question is God's justice or fairness. We have to be very careful when we allow our mind to go in this direction. Any question like this must be kept within the context of God's wisdom, his love, and his foreknowledge of all things. God knows the end from the beginning. Was the life of the apostle James wasted because he died so early in his ministry? We might say the same thing about the Lord himself. Jesus only lived about 33 years on this earth before he was crucified. Who are we to judge if a man's life is wasted?

This question reminds me of the missionary martyr Jim Elliot. He was a young man, in his thirties, but died on the mission field trying to reach the Auca Indians in South America with the gospel. Some people might say his early death was a waste of a life. But what was the result of this? His testimony and those who died with him traveled around the world. Their sacrifice inspired an entire generation of young men to give their lives as missionaries for the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is not recorded what happened as a result of the death of Stephen or James. But rest assured they did not die in vain. Their lives had an impact upon their generation. Their testimony is still with us today in the Holy Bible.

Any life given to the Lord is never wasted. All things work together for the good of those who love God and who are called according to his purpose.

The Rescue of Peter (Acts 12:5-19)

Herod arrested Peter and put him in prison. We have a detailed description of his imprisonment with a multitude of soldiers and two chains. He was locked down. Herod's intention was to execute Peter after Easter.

However, the Lord had other plans for the apostle Peter. The Lord sent his angel to rescue Peter out of this prison. The angel hit Peter to wake him up. The angel told him to put on his clothes and follow him. The angel led him out of the prison and into the street. The entire time Peter did not think it was real. He thought he was having a vision. It was only after the angel left him that Peter realized he was indeed delivered from prison by an angel from the Lord.

The ministry of angels is real. The Lord sends angels to intervene in the lives of people as he sees a need. I've heard testimonies of people who knew they were delivered from a life threatening situation by a mysterious man who would disappear afterwards. Angels walk among us. They are ministers of

God doing his will and they intervene in the lives of people. I believe they especially intervene in the lives of Christians. The Bible tells us they minister to those who inherit salvation. (Hebrews 1:14).

People can get caught up in the worship of angels. It is important to acknowledge that angels are real but at the same time do not become caught up in worshipping angels. This is a trap of the enemy. Don't allow yourself to get sidetracked into the worship of angels. Angels of God will redirect worship to God alone. We see this in the Bible when men would fall down before an angel. The angel would rebuke them and tell them to worship God alone. (Revelation 22:8-9; Colossians 2:18).

The Lord can rescue us out of any situation. As long as God still has a purpose for you on this planet he will save you, rescue you, feed you, and take care of you.

However, when your mission is complete then it is time to go. Nothing will stop you from leaving this planet when your mission is complete. This is why it is completely useless to be afraid of death.

Stop and ponder the fact that Peter was sound asleep the night before he was supposed to be executed. Do you think he was afraid? I don't think he was concerned. Peter saw his Lord killed on a cross, and buried in a tomb. He saw Jesus alive from the dead.

Death no longer had any power in Peter's mind. He knew Jesus Christ is resurrection and life. There is no fear of death for the believer in Jesus Christ. Anyone who lives and believes in Jesus will never die but just pass from this life to the next life.

When Peter showed up at John Mark's house the church who prayed for him had a strange reaction. They did not believe he was in fact out of prison. They thought that Rhoda who heard Peter's voice was seeing or hearing his "angel". What does that mean?

God saves, rescues, and delivers. Trust in the Lord with your life. Do not live in fear of what tomorrow may bring. Instead, rejoice in God who is more than able to supply all of your needs.

The Death of Herod (Acts 12:20-25)

An angel rescued the lowly apostle from prison. The same man who arrested Peter, Herod, now exalted himself and was acclaimed as a god by the people who heard him speak. An angel rescued Peter but an angel killed Herod. He didn't die slowly, and he didn't die with dignity. He was immediately struck down by the angel and was eaten by worms. This is not the first example of God's wrath in the book of Acts. Remember Ananias and Sapphira? People have no idea who they are messing with when it comes to dealing with the Lord. They have no concept of God's power and majesty. Rest assured any man who exalts himself or allows himself to be worshiped will be struck down sooner or later with God's wrath. The sentence of death has already been passed. The wages of sin is death.

The only hope anyone has to escape from the punishment of their sins is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus died for our sins on the cross, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day. We are justified through the work which Jesus did. His work is complete and finished. All God wants from us is to hear, receive, and believe the good news. Our sins are forgiven through the work which Jesus did for us.

All human rulers eventually fail. The answer to our problems is not human government. People put so much energy and faith in politics and human government. This is not the real answer to our problems. Our real answer is to live by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in any man. Man cannot save us. Only Jesus can save us from ourselves.

We can see the implosion of human government today. All political systems eventually deteriorate and fail. There are no solutions which men can come up with that can sustain life for a long period of time. This world system is based on the principles of death and self worship. It is doomed to failure.

I look forward to the kingdom of God coming to this earth. There will be no real life until Jesus returns and saves us.

A Light For The Gentiles – Acts Chapter 13

Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1-12)

This missionary journey began with fasting and prayer. Paul did not work alone but in the company of other believers. There were men who were gifted as prophets, and they fasted and prayed with Paul and Barnabas. While they fasted, prayed, and worshiped the Lord the Holy Spirit spoke and told them to set aside Barnabas and Paul. After they fasted and prayed these men laid hands on Paul and Barnabas and then sent them off to do their work for the Lord.

On this missionary journey John Mark was with them as their helper. He traveled with them as far as Perga before he turned back to Jerusalem. This seemed like a small detail but it came into play later when it caused a break up of this team between Paul and Barnabas.

When they preached they would go to the Jewish synagogues first and preach the gospel. They continued to travel and preach and ran into opposition with a sorcerer by the name of Elymas. This man tried to oppose their message, but Paul proved that greater is HE that is in the Christian than he that lives in sorcerers. Paul spoke God's word and this man was struck with temporary blindness. The proconsul to whom they preached saw this and was astounded and he believed the gospel.

The enemy opposes the work of God, but when believers stand upon the sacred ground of the finished work of Jesus Christ and take their authority in Jesus name the enemy has to retreat. Scripture teaches us to submit ourselves to God and resist the devil and the devil will flee. The devil cannot stand up against the power of the Holy Spirit.

1 John 4:4, *"You, little children, are from God and have overcome them, because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."*

I remember when I was a young Christian and traveled with a group of men who went to churches and shared our testimony. We stopped at a McDonald's to eat lunch and there was a witch there at that McDonald's. She was very agitated at us and came up behind one of our group at the order counter. This Christian man turned around and said *"Greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world"*. This woman let out a screech and ran out of that McDonald's. I had never seen anything like that before

and have not seen anything like it since then. It was an extraordinary demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit.

The enemy was defeated by the Lord Jesus at Calvary. Jesus destroyed the work of the devil through his death, and burial, and resurrection. We need to continue to abide in the gospel, and proclaim the good news that Jesus saves. Amen.

In Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13-41)

John Mark left the missionary group to return to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas continued to go forward and entered a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. Here they were invited to share their message to the local congregation.

Paul presented a simple and straight forward message from God's word and proved that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of bible prophecy. He was the fulfillment of God's promises made to David in the Old Testament. Jesus fulfilled the prophecies in scripture about the Messiah. Paul exhorted the people to believe that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of everything the Bible pointed to. Through the Lord Jesus men receive forgiveness of sins and justification. I like how Paul puts this when he drives home the truth about justification.

Acts 13:39, "Through Him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses."

The law of Moses only pointed us forward to Jesus. The law was a teacher to lead us to Christ. But the fulfillment of everything in the Bible was found in Jesus Christ. Why do people want to go back to following the law and religious rules? Because they do not really know Jesus. They do not have a personal relationship with the Messiah.

Everyone who knows the Lord Jesus is set free from the law of God. We are not saved, justified, sanctified, or glorified by the law of God or through striving with the law of God. The law of God shows us we are sinners in need of the Savior. Period. The End.

Paul preached to these people that the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem rejected Jesus Christ and had him crucified. Jesus died on the cross, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day. His resurrection was witnessed by many people. Jesus Christ is Lord. He is the Messiah. He is fully God, and he is fully man. He is our substitute before God. All of our sins are washed away in the blood of Jesus Christ. There is nothing the devil can do now. All the power of the devil was stripped away from him. None of his accusations can stick any longer to the man who believes in Jesus Christ.

It would be a good idea to read this sermon repeatedly to understand the outline of the message we need to proclaim to our generation. There are so many messages that people preach today. But who is proclaiming this message that Paul preached in that synagogue?

The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ today and be saved.

A Light for the Gentiles (Acts 13:42-52)

After their first message to the synagogue the people wanted them to come back and preach again. What we might call revival today broke out in that area after just one service. The following week when they came back to preach again the whole town came out to hear them preach. Because the crowds were so huge the Jews in the synagogue were jealous and stirred up trouble. They contradicted the message that Paul and Barnabas preached. As a result, Paul and Barnabas told them that since the Jews rejected the gospel that it would turn to the salvation of the Gentiles. When the Jews rejected the gospel then they would preach to the Gentiles. This was their pattern in the ministry. They would always try to reach the Jewish people first. When the Jewish people would not receive the message then they turned and preached the gospel to the Gentile people.

Paul quoted bible prophecy about the gospel going to the Gentiles. In verse 47 he quoted the bible prophecy that said that the message of God would be a light to the Gentiles.

From this point forward we see the gospel went more and more to the Gentile people who gladly heard and received the message of salvation. Today we don't even think of the church as being Jewish, but the gospel is still to this day for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. The light came from Israel, and went to the nations. Always remember that Jesus in his humanity came into this world as a Jewish man. Any hatred against Jewish people is hatred against God. The Jewish people still hold an important part in God's plan and they are beloved by God for the sake of their fathers.

Jesus is the light of the Gentiles. He died on the cross, not only for the elect of Israel, but also for everyone who would hear the message and believe. Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day.

Sending Missionaries – Acts Chapter 14

Paul and Barnabas at Iconium (Acts 14:1-7)

When they arrived at Iconium Paul and Barnabas went to the Jewish synagogue. They preached the gospel to the local congregation and people believed their message. The unbelieving Jews poisoned the minds of the Gentiles in the area against the message of the apostles. They continued to preach boldly for a while until the religious people and the secular government united against them in a plot to kill them. When they heard of this they fled and continued to preach the gospel in new places.

This is a pattern repeated through the book of Acts and the record of the early church. The gospel was preached without compromise and the Holy Spirit confirmed the message with signs and wonders through those who preached the message. Many people believed the message. Those who did not believe would violently oppose them. There was no middle ground. Those who did not believe would not just live and let live. They violently opposed the message of the gospel.

This contrast shows us there are only two sides. We are either for the Lord Jesus or we are against him. There is no real middle ground. God is light, and in him there is no darkness. We are in agreement with God's message about his son Jesus Christ, or we are in disagreement. People who do not believe the gospel will evolve to violently oppose it. This message greatly antagonizes unbelievers to the point that they must fight against it with violence. This pattern is seen from the beginning with Cain and Abel.

When I mention patterns I am talking about certain fixed, unchanging principles which are built into the world. These fixed and unchanging principles point us to God who never changes. God is eternal. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. These fixed truths reflect our Creator. God will not conform himself to man.

When men are exposed to the gospel they are reminded that God is their creator and owns them. Men naturally rebel against God's authority over them. Man-made religion does not have this impact. Man-made religion makes men comfortable in their sin and rebellion. But the gospel does not allow us to remain in our sin. God's love demonstrated in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ will not allow us to justify ourselves or our sin. We either accept God's free gift of salvation provided through Christ's atonement or we are separated from God forever in a devil's hell.

Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day, according to the scriptures. Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

The Visit to Lystra and Derbe (Acts 14:8-20)

While in the cities of Lystra and Derbe Paul preached and saw a man lame from birth. Paul saw the man had faith to be healed and said loudly to him to stand up. The man jumped to his feet and was healed. The people recognized this was a miracle. This is similar to how Peter and John healed the lame man at the temple and had similar consequences for the apostles.

After this man was healed the people decided Barnabas and Paul were gods and attempted to sacrifice to them. The apostles rebuked them for this and tried to point the crowd to the Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time, there were Jews who arrived. They had previously persecuted the apostles in other cities. They now stirred up the crowd to stone Paul. Paul was stoned, he was dragged bodily through the city, and then was left outside the city for dead. They presumed he was dead. When the disciples went to collect the corpse Paul arose and went back into the city. Shortly thereafter he and Barnabas left to preach in other places.

This incident of Paul's stoning was probably an example of a near death experience. Later in 2 Corinthians 12 Paul described himself seeing the third heaven. It is possible he might have died temporarily and went to heaven and then the Lord sent him back to continue his work. This experience left a deep impression on Paul. There are many people who share testimonies of dying and coming back and their stories tend to share common points.

There is life after death. Our existence does not end when we leave this temporary shell of our body. The soul of man continues to exist. We are made in the image of God and will continue to endure. There is no question about this.

However, the question is: where will you live? Will we live with God, or will we go to a place of eternal separation from God? We cannot begin to imagine how horrible it would be to exist in a place separated from God. Everyone on this earth enjoys God's presence whether they realize it or not. They enjoy day, and light, and days, and weeks, and months, and years, and can be inspired by nature, or art, or even a bright, blue sky. None of those things exist where God's presence is absent. Imagine existing in a place of complete darkness where there is no joy, or peace, or happiness. It is the complete absence

of all that is good and everything we take for granted on earth. I don't want to go there. When I leave this body I want to go and be with the Lord Jesus Christ.

How can we make sure that we go to God when we die? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture says that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

The Return To Syrian Antioch (Acts 14:21-25)

Here we have details on the missionary journey the apostles took. It lists the cities and towns they traveled through and the work they did in those areas. One phrase that stands out to me in these verses: *"...we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God"*. People need to remember this.

What does this mean? For starters, we should not tell potential new Christians that if they get saved all of their problems will go away. Don't tell a new Christian that once they are saved they will be healthy, wealthy, and all of their problems will be over.

Instead, we should teach new Christians that there is difficulty ahead. Unbelievers and religious people persecute born again Christians. The Calvary road is the path of denying self, taking up the cross, and enduring what the world throws at us.

However, as we continue to walk by faith and endure we experience the presence of the Lord, and this brings peace and joy. This peace the world cannot understand. We are blessed with spiritual blessings from the Lord which provides us with peace in the midst of every storm. We have the presence of the Holy Spirit to comfort us, teach us, guide us, and lead us.

What does the world have? All they have is what the world system teaches them: money, fame, pride, fleeting success, and building their lives upon a foundation that crumbles in the end.

What does the Christian have? We have a solid foundation in the Lord Jesus Christ which will endure no matter what tribulation we go through.

The apostles helped the local churches organize with local leadership. They prayed for them, laid hands on men, appointed leadership, and helped them to have churches that were well grounded and stable in bible doctrine.

The Report to the Church at Antioch (Acts 14:26-28)

The apostles shared an account of their journey and mission with the local church. This was an example which is followed to this day in many churches that send out missionaries. The missionaries go to the field for a while, and then they come back to their sending churches to report on their progress, on how many people were saved, or baptized, or joined their local missionary churches.

This showed us the principle of how the body of Christ worked together to accomplish the Lord's great commission. Not everyone went to the foreign mission field. However, never forget that the local area where we live is still a mission field. There are still people in our local area who need to hear the gospel and be brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

There are many reasons to share the account of missionaries. One purpose was to inspire and motivate Christians in local churches to remember the great commission and our true calling from God to be salt and light in this world.

Another purpose was to help provide material support for the work the missionaries did in the field. Who would support the people in the field if it was not the local church? Who would help financially support the missionaries if the local church did not do it? When the local church did not support missionaries then the missionaries could not do their work either. As a result, people are not reached with the gospel in foreign countries.

It is the job of the entire church to reach the entire world with the gospel. Many people do this right now but they need prayer and financial support to accomplish the work of the great commission.

False Religion – Acts Chapter 15

The Dispute over Circumcision (Acts 15:1-4)

The introduction of religious tradition and rules into the church started way back in the early church. Why do we see this record of the introduction of Judaism back into the Christian church? It shows us how the enemy operates to dilute or cancel the gospel of grace. The church is not bound by the Hebrew or Jewish rules, traditions, or observances. However, there were always men who crept into the church to infect God's people with religious leaven.

At that time those men attempted to introduce false doctrine that taught that in order to be saved a man had to be circumcised. This was in direct contradiction to the gospel of grace which Paul preached. Paul and Barnabas immediately disputed with the false teachers because they recognized this false gospel attempting to infiltrate the church.

How did the devil attempt to destroy the church? He inspired religious people to persecute and kill the true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

After he stirred up the followers of dead religion he then stirred up unbelievers in government, business, and society to persecute believers in Jesus.

Another strategy the enemy used in his war against the church was to send false brethren who taught doctrines of devils. A doctrine of devils minimizes or makes the work of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary irrelevant.

If circumcision was needed in order to be saved then why did Jesus die on the cross? If we can do anything to earn salvation, or indeed, do anything to further spiritual growth through striving to obey religious laws then Christ's work upon Calvary was not enough.

Do you see why this is so horrible when people add or take away from the gospel? In essence these men denied the gospel by adding to it and thereby rendering the message void of salvation.

How many people follow church rules and traditions but have no saving faith in Christ because they never heard the gospel? How many religious people are there who are not even saved? False gospels in today's world abound. We see the beginning of the work of false gospels in this chapter.

May the Lord give us discernment and wisdom so that we are not deceived by false gospels of men.

The Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:5-21)

The controversy of introducing traditions back into the church continued.

Some of the Pharisees believed the gospel yet were unable to let go of their religious traditions handed down to them by their fathers.

The leaders in the church came together to consider this matter. They understood the importance of clarifying this question to everyone because it had great potential of damaging the work of the gospel.

During this council Peter gave his testimony of how God used him to preach at the home of Cornelius. Now we see the importance of why God chose Peter to preach the gospel to the Gentiles even though the main evangelism of Gentiles was picked up by Paul. It was important that Peter experience this because he was a leader in the early church in Jerusalem.

After Peter exhorted them not to put a yoke around the neck of the Gentiles believers then Paul and Barnabas shared their account of ministry among the Gentiles.

After Paul and Barnabas finished the apostle James spoke for them all.

These men all spoke by the same Holy Spirit and were all in agreement. They knew by the Holy Spirit that it was wrong to burden believers in Christ. It is by grace we are saved, through faith, not of works. We are saved by grace and faith in Jesus Christ and not by following religious rules.

James quoted scripture which pointed to the gospel traveling to Gentiles. James decided not to trouble the Gentiles with Hebrew or Jewish traditions but instead wrote a letter exhorting them to abstain from idols, fornication, and things strangled, and from blood. This was the bare minimum requirement. The dietary exhortations were there for good health but also have spiritual implications as well. Life is in the blood. Blood is sacred to God. Men are not supposed to eat meat with blood in it. It is bad for your health. But notice that they did not forbid people from eating meat. They did not bring them into bondage to any Jewish tradition or rules.

There is no circumcision, Sabbath keeping, holy day observing, or any other kind of tradition or rules that Christians were commanded to keep. All the observances of holidays which Christians keep today stem from pagan traditions which were funneled through a compromising Catholic church. The Protestant Christians were unable to shake themselves free from these things.

Why are these issues so important? There are many Christians who are very conscientious and easily deceived into obeying rules, traditions, and laws which God does not put upon us.

Why is this important? Because men use religious systems to control and manipulate people. They use these systems to make a name for themselves, to exalt themselves, to make a name for their sect, their denomination, or their particular brand of church.

All these divisions come from carnal men, from the devil, and from people exalting themselves over their brethren.

At every point where a church thinks it is "distinct" from other Christians we will find a spirit of pride and self exaltation. At these points of division there is always pride and self worship involved.

The Letter to the Gentile Believers (Acts 15:22-29)

Here we have an exact copy of the letter the church council sent to their sister churches. These sister churches were primarily Gentiles and needed help to resolve these religious controversies.

Why did the Holy Spirit think this letter was so important that it was included word for word in the Holy Bible?

I am of the firm belief that a great danger to the church is false religion and false spirituality. This false religious spirit in the church is manifest primarily by adding to or taking away from the gospel.

What do men add to the gospel? Traditions. Rules. Laws. They attempt to make themselves more spiritual than other brothers in Christ because they observe this, or they keep such and such holiday, or they have certain standards which other churches don't have. These extra religious burdens are put upon men by men who exalt themselves over their brethren.

We have this letter as a reminder to never listen to any man who wants to lay a religious burden on you. Don't even let a preacher make you uneasy because you missed church on Sunday. Don't ever let any man dictate to your conscience with any kind of rule, law, standard, tradition, or morality.

Our morality is the Holy Ghost who lives inside of us. Our law is not a moral code, but it is the Holy Ghost who lives within us and tells us how to live, behave, speak, and act. We must learn to completely rely upon the Holy Ghost inside of us. If you add anything to the gospel then you are not listening to the Holy Ghost but you are listening to carnal men who want to control your life, take your money, and exalt themselves.

Read this letter and ask yourself a question. How many traditions am I following that God has not asked me to follow? How many rules do I follow that have been taught to me by men but have not been taught to me by the Holy Ghost? How many traditions do I blindly accept that men practice but are not taught by the Holy Ghost?

Read the Bible for yourself. Evaluate and test everything by the Holy Ghost and the scripture. Do not be a blind follower of men, but always seek for the freedom that you have in Christ Jesus. Come out of false churches, false denominations, false sects, cults, and religious groups. Come out of them! Humble yourself before the Lord, call on the name of Jesus, and ask the Lord to fill you with the Holy Ghost. All you need is Jesus!

The Believers At Antioch Rejoice (Acts 15:30-35)

The brothers arrived at the church in Antioch and read the letter to the church. The brothers in Christ at Antioch rejoiced and were relieved at being set free from the false religion of the Hebrew Christians. They now knew for certain that they were free to follow God and not be obligated to follow the religious rules and traditions of men.

We are not bound by man-made rules, traditions, and laws. Instead, we have been set free by the Holy Ghost so we can serve God in the power of the Spirit. Those who live according to the letter of the law are covered up with spiritual death. Their ministry is a ministry of death and condemnation.

But those who minister in the power of the Holy Spirit bring spiritual life. Jesus said that his words were spirit and life. If we go to a church where we walk out every Sunday more depressed than when we went in then something is wrong! Why keep going somewhere that is oppressed by the devil? Come out from among them and be separate and touch not this unclean religion of men.

Allow me to provide examples of dead religion: the Catholic church, the Kingdom Hall of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons). All of these are dead religions and full of evil spirits. Get out of there! Don't look back.

Even mainline "Christian" denominations have widespread gangrene and death in their churches as well.

Any church, ministry, denomination, or preacher that denies that God is three in one (the Trinity) or who deny that Jesus Christ is God and Man, are a cult.

Jesus is fully God. He is also fully man. He is the God Man. Don't let go of either one. Jesus is a man. Jesus is God. He is both. As a man he is our Savior and the Lamb of God. As God he is our Lord and King. If we deny either of these then we are a false dead religion cult. People who deny the Trinity are incidentally denying either the humanity or divinity of Jesus Christ.

Notice the Bible said that Judas and Silas were prophets. What does this tell us? The ministry of prophets did not end with John the Baptist. There were New Testament prophets. There were prophets in the early church and there are still prophets in the church today. Don't listen to Pharisees in the modern church who say there are no apostles and prophets in the church today. They are just trying to keep the control of God's people to themselves. They are controlling God's people because of pride and money.

Don't listen to preachers who say that the gifts of the Holy Ghost are not for today. Don't listen to preachers who say there are no apostles and prophets today. These preachers have a lying and deceiving spirit on them. They are controlled by the false spirit of dead religion.

The church today needs prophets who will build, and encourage, and comfort God's people. I believe before the end of all things we will see a revival of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the church. We need this! We are in the last days! We need true, God anointed watchmen and prophets and shepherds to warn God's people and exhort God's people and comfort God's people.

Look at the result of these prophet's words! The people rejoiced. Do you want to see true joy in God's people. Let loose some of God's prophets and you will see rejoicing again among God's people.

Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36-41)

Here we come to the separation of Paul and Barnabas. Up until this point Paul and Barnabas were together in the ministry. Barnabas wanted to take Mark, but Paul did not want him because Mark had turned back. Paul did not have any confidence in Mark. As always Barnabas stood up for the underdog. Two teams were created instead of just one. These two brothers took two other brothers and the two teams went in different directions.

Division is never a good thing. I know I've heard a lot of preachers say this division was a good thing because it meant that the work of the ministry was multiplied, but I'm not so sure about that. I don't think division is ever a good thing.

We see the facts are just reported as they happened. I don't see anything good about this break up of men in the ministry. But we are given the facts as they happened. Paul took Silas and went in one direction. Barnabas took Mark and went in another direction. Sadly, I don't think we hear anymore about Barnabas in the book of Acts. The record continued to follow Paul and Silas and what happened in their work. Mark was mentioned later in the New Testament in Paul's letter to Timothy. Paul seemed to have changed his mind about Mark and said he was profitable for the ministry. Maybe later he grew to regret this falling out between himself and Barnabas.

The work continued to spread. They continued to visit brethren in every city where they had preached in order to build the churches in the faith. Paul went through Syria and Cilicia confirming the churches.

Let us always strive to live at peace with all men as much as it is in our power to do so. Avoid conflict and division as much as possible. No matter what happens continue to do the work God called you to do. Even if you have to walk the road on your own don't stop preaching the word. Keep on lifting up the name of Jesus.

How To Be Saved - Acts Chapter 16

Timothy Joined Paul and Silas (Acts 16:1-5)

A young man who was a disciple of the Lord Jesus joined Paul. This young man was Timothy.

We know a lot about Timothy because we have two letters which Paul wrote to Timothy. We know Timothy grew to be an important leader in the church and was trusted by the apostle Paul.

We have a brief sketch of Timothy's history in these verses. His mother was a Jew and a believer in Jesus. His father was a Gentile.

When Paul took Timothy as a co-worker in the gospel he circumcised Timothy. This might seem to contradict what we read earlier about how Paul and Barnabas opposed the practice of circumcision in the church.

In the earlier context it was Jews who tried to bring circumcision into the church and force the practice upon Gentiles in order to prove their salvation.

In the current context Paul circumcised Timothy because they tried to reach unbelieving Jews with the gospel and he wanted to remove anything which would be an obstacle. He tried to remove any excuse Jews had to not listen to their presentation of the gospel.

Think of it like this. Would you go into a Muslim country to preach the gospel and order a pork sandwich in front of someone you witnessed to? Probably not. It would be a stumbling block to them, because in their religion and culture that is unclean.

Paul tried to remove anything from his life and Timothy's that would be a stumbling block to the Jews coming to faith in Christ.

This had nothing to do with how Paul opposed the believing Jews who wanted to include circumcision into the fabric and life of the church. In that case it was right to resist and to oppose religious traditions like circumcision.

In Paul's own words, he allowed himself to be under the law in order to reach those who were under the law. And when he preached to Gentiles he became like them in order to reach them with the gospel. He was willing to lay aside his own personal preferences or lifestyle in order to reach people with the gospel. The most important thing to Paul was that people be brought to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Timothy was known to have a Gentile father. This would stop them from going into synagogues and preaching in those regions. So, in order to continue his ministry in synagogues he had to play by the rules of the synagogue. He became a Jew in order to reach Jews with the gospel. He became a Roman at times, also, in order to further his work. He used whatever tools he had to reach people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is no contradiction if you understand the context and why he circumcised Timothy.

The churches were established in the faith and increased in number daily.

Paul's Vision Of The Macedonian (Acts 16:6-10)

The Holy Spirit was actively involved in the ministry of Paul and his fellow workers. The Holy Spirit made it clear to them what direction to take, where to go, and who they should preach the gospel to. The Lord gave men visions and dreams in order to help them to understand his will for their work and ministry.

Why do some Christians today refuse to believe that God can speak to us like this? Why would God speak to men like this?

I believe God speaks to us like this. God speaks through the scriptures, and through the written word of God. Anything we receive in a vision or dream must be evaluated and judged by God's written word.

However, the Holy Spirit speaks to us in whatever way he wants to. He can speak to us in an audible voice. He can speak to us through people. God can even speak through unbelievers. He spoke through a donkey one time to Balaam! God is able to speak through whatever means he chooses.

I think one of the tragedies of the modern church is that individual Christians no longer believe God can speak to them personally. They do not need a priest, or a pastor, or anyone to speak to them for God. They can hear God speak to them personally.

After Paul had this vision the team changed direction and went to Macedonia to preach the gospel.

Lydia's Conversion In Philippi (Acts 16:11-15)

After Paul's vision of the man from Macedonia who asked for help the ministry team traveled to that region. A big city in that area was the city of Philippi so they went there. They were strategic in their ministry and went to a large city in the area where the Lord pointed them.

While in that city they were strategic in their timing. They went on a Sabbath day to a place where they knew people gathered to pray.

Lydia heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and believed. She was baptized and everyone in her house. The scripture says her heart was open to the Lord. She listened to what Paul preached. This is a detail I think is important in evangelism.

Look for people who listen. Look for people who have an open heart to the things of God and who want to know more about the Lord. Not everyone will listen. We only have a short time to reach people for the gospel. We should be strategic in where we go, what time we go, and who we invest our time with.

These verses show us that this missionary team was not random in where they went, areas they targeted, and who they invested ministry in.

How can we reach people today? A lot of people are on the internet. It is a good place to preach God's word. There are many free online services which Christians can use to teach, preach, and share the gospel. At the moment I'm using various platforms for blogs and also I use free video services for audio and video outreach.

Notice, also, that baptism was an important aspect of discipleship. These new believers in the book of Acts were baptized. They were baptized in water, and they were also baptized in the Holy Ghost. There are plenty of examples of baptism in the book of Acts. I believe this and communion are probably the bare essential traditions which churches should continue to maintain. Communion is to remember the Lord's death until he comes. Baptism is a testimony that we have died to this world and we now are in Christ Jesus. We are dead to sin and we are alive to God. (Read Romans 6 for more on baptism).

Paul And Silas Imprisoned (Acts 16:16-24)

Around the same time Paul preached the gospel to Lydia and she was saved there was another woman impacted by Paul's ministry. However, this woman was sent by the devil to disrupt the ministry. She was possessed by a devil and brought money to her owners through a fortune telling business.

As an aside, this should clearly show us that people involved in fortune telling, card reading, and such activity are participating with demons and evil spirits. Stay away from them! Stay away even from horoscopes in the newspaper! This activity is used by the devil.

The demon possessed girl followed Paul and Silas around and proclaimed that they were servants of God showing the way of salvation. Why do you think the devil would do this? Why do you think a devil would want to associate fortune telling with gospel proclamation? This was a strategy of the devil to corrupt the gospel. It was an attempt to associate the gospel with people who were demon possessed and with fortune telling. The enemy has no problem sliding up next to Christians and pretending he is one in order to bring confusion and corruption to the gospel and the church.

Paul would not stand for it. He rebuked the devil and told it to come out of the woman. The woman lost her ability to do fortune telling. What does this tell us? People who have power to do fortune telling do this with the power of demons and evil spirits. Stay away from them! Do not participate in this wickedness. If a person participates in this there is a good chance they will be demonized.

When the owners of the woman realized they could no longer make money from fortune telling they persecuted Paul and Silas. What would happen if the church cast devils out of people in government, business, and society? What would happen if Christians were full of the Holy Ghost and drove out the devil? It would bring opposition. It would bring persecution. It would also bring revival.

Paul and Silas were caught, tried, and beaten, and thrown into jail. But this is not the end of this story.

What lessons do we learn here? Fortune tellers are demon possessed. People who dabble in the occult risk being possessed by demons and devils. Stay from this! Stay away from anything that resembles evil. Do not associate with people like this, even if they pretend to support the church, ministry, or the gospel. The devil will pretend to support preachers, churches, and ministries in order to infiltrate and corrupt. It takes wisdom from God to discern when this is happening and to drive out the devil like Paul did here. When you cast out devils expect that the enemy will stir up opposition and persecution.

The Conversion Of The Jailer (Acts 16:25-34)

Paul and Silas were arrested, beaten, and thrown into jail. The jailer was told to put them in secure lock down so that was what he did. He put them into chains in the dungeon.

What was the response of Paul and Silas to this persecution and injustice? They praised the Lord. In the darkness of that dungeon they lifted their voices to Jesus and praised him.

What was God's response to their situation? God shook that prison with an earthquake and opened the doors of the jail. All of the prisoners could have ran out and escaped but everyone stayed put. Why?

Everyone there, including the jailer, knew this was God. Paul and Silas were from God. Their ability to praise God in this situation was proof of God. And the earthquake was from God. The prisoners did not presume it was in their best interest to run away.

What was the response of the jailer to Paul, Silas, their praise songs, and the earthquake? He was about to kill himself, but Paul stopped him, and told him they were all accounted for. The jailer falls on his knees before Paul and asks him what he can do to be saved.

Paul preached the gospel to this man and he got saved. All of his household was saved. What was the message Paul preached to him? Paul told him to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and he would be saved and his household. The man believed, and was baptized, and then he helped Paul. He fed them, he bandaged their wounds, and was ready to serve the Lord.

This is an amazing account of events which really happened. Everything we read in this portion of scripture actually took place. How would you feel if you were arrested for preaching the gospel and thrown into a dungeon? Would you react in the same way as Paul and Silas? What would you do if the man who persecuted you asked you how he could be saved? Would you take the opportunity to get revenge? Or would you share with that man how his sins could be forgiven by faith in Jesus Christ?

Salvation is as simple as believing in Jesus Christ. How did this man get saved? He believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and he was saved and his household.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved.

An Official Apology (Acts 16:35-40)

The magistrates who persecuted Paul and Silas somehow knew they were wrong. They wanted Paul and Silas to be let go and for them to leave quietly.

You have to laugh at Paul's response to them. He actually made them come down to the prison and fetch him personally. He wanted a personal apology for what happened.

And why were the magistrates afraid of Paul now? Because they found out he was a Roman citizen. To understand that you have to understand the history of the Romans. It was illegal to treat a Roman like this. Romans had civic rights. As Romans, you couldn't beat a man unless he was charged and convicted of a crime in a court. Paul was a Roman who was beaten but was not convicted of a crime. The magistrates were smart enough to figure this out. That is why they were afraid. They thought Paul would sue them? Or at least report them to the local Roman centurion's office?

This is an unusual story. We see the response of the people in business, in government, and in society to the gospel. Some people believed the gospel and were saved. Some were angry because of the gospel and others lost money from their shady business. People invested in the work of the devil stirred up the most trouble. They were motivated by love of money to persecute Paul and Silas. Let that be a lesson. If you threaten people's money by preaching the gospel they come after you.

The gospel threatens government, business, and society. It shows us we are sinners. It shows us we are wrong. It shows us this world system is wrong, and we pay a price for rebelling against the Creator.

Jesus paid the price for us, but unless one is willing to accept his offer and believe the gospel we will die for our sins. We will be punished for our sins if we reject the free offer of God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Reject Jesus and we condemn yourself to hell. This is why people are angry at the gospel. It is the same reason Cain was angry. They want to tell God what to do. They don't want God telling them what to do.

May God have mercy on us, and help us to humble ourselves. Everyone who calls on the name of Jesus will be saved.

Study The Scriptures – Acts Chapter 17

The Uproar in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9)

The missionary team traveled to Thessalonica where they followed their pattern of ministry. They went to the synagogue first and preached the gospel. People believed the message, but those who didn't believe stirred up trouble. Everywhere they went they preached the gospel, people got saved, and then persecution started.

What is the Lord teaching us? Success in ministry draws the attack of the enemy. We should always anticipate that success will draw the attack of the enemy. What do we do? We persevere. Depending on the situation, sometimes they would continue right where they were at. Sometimes, depending on the situation, they would flee and escape to another location to continue the work.

The world hates the gospel. People who reject the gospel will not only reject it but seek to overthrow it.

In today's world we see the enemy tries to erase Christianity and replace it with a new social justice religion. This political and social movement today will result in persecution of Christians. This is just another Satanic movement.

God is still in control. The Lord sits upon his throne. No matter what happens in the nations of this world the Lord is still in control. The Lord told us ahead of time what would happen so that when it happened we would believe in him.

Trust in the Lord today. Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God. Trust in the Lord. He will not fail us. He will carry on to completion the good work he started in us. (Philippians 1:6).

The Character Of The Bereans (Acts 17:10-15)

The brothers in Thessalonica sent Paul and Silas away by night to the city of Berea. When they arrived in that city they continued the same pattern of ministry. They went to the Jewish synagogue and preached that Jesus Christ is Lord. The Bereans responded differently than those in Thessalonica. The scripture is careful to point out that the people in Berea were noble and they searched the scriptures

daily to see if what Paul and Silas taught them was correct. As a result of their careful study they discovered the truth of the gospel which Paul and Silas preached to them.

The application of this is for us also to search the scriptures daily. We should be like the Bereans who searched the scriptures. What other authority do we have in life? Will we trust our lives to our opinions, or logic and reasoning? Or will we trust in the Bible? I choose to trust in God's word. When we approach the Bible with faith and humility we discover that God's word is true. Let us not be like those in Thessalonica who persecuted the apostles. But, instead, let us be like the Bereans and study God's word.

When the people in Thessalonica heard Paul and Silas were preaching in Berea they went there to persecute them as well. These people did to Paul the same thing Paul did before he was saved. This shows it was not just people in disagreement. There was an evil spirit driving these people to persecute Christians. The same is true today. This evil spirit is still in the world today. It is setting a trap even now to engulf the entire world in a final snare which will almost wipe out humanity if God did not intervene. The Lord will intervene. Jesus is coming back.

The believers in Berea sent Paul away to continue the work in other areas. However, even after Paul left there were still some disciples left to continue the work. For a while Silas and Timothy continued the work even after Paul was gone.

Sometimes our part is to begin a work for God and others have the task to continue it. Sometimes we may have the job of continuing a work which somebody else started. Regardless, we are called to be faithful to the work the Lord assigned to us.

Paul In Athens (Acts 17:16-21)

Paul arrived in Athens and was provoked by flaunted idolatry in the city. He was eager to preach the gospel. He went to the synagogue and also to the marketplace to share God's word. He disputed with people. This word "dispute" paints the picture of Paul arguing with people. I don't think Paul argued in a negative or threatening manner, but debated vigorously with those who engaged him in conversation. Paul got the attention of the philosophers in the city. These philosophers were interested in any new philosophy or religion. They invited Paul to speak to them and share his doctrine.

The message Paul preached was Jesus Christ and the resurrection. We have other examples in the book of Acts of sermons the apostles preached. They used the written scripture they had, including the law and prophets, to prove Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of bible prophecy. They used bible prophecy to prove Jesus Christ was the Messiah. Jesus Christ is Lord. Paul and the other apostles taught from the Bible that Jesus died for our sins at Calvary, was buried, and rose again the third day. He did not preach a made up story. Everything he preached was rooted in the reality of God's word and historical facts. These things happened. Jesus died on a cross. He was buried. He rose from the dead on the third day.

Notice the elite philosophers considered Paul a "babbler". It is interesting how intellectuals never change. Intellectual people today still look down their noses at Christians who preach the gospel. The pride of man never changes. This shows us something about the unchanging character of fallen man. Without the grace of God every single man is doomed to the consequences of their own pride and unbelief. God shows grace to us by sending people to preach the gospel. Those who will humble

themselves and believe the gospel are saved from God's wrath and the inevitable consequences of human pride and unbelief.

Paul preached to all ethnic and religious groups of people. He was ready to preach to the religious Jews. He was ready to preach to the intellectual Greek and Gentile. No matter who he encountered Paul's message did not change. He preached the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who were Jews or Gentiles that believed were saved. God showed no favoritism. Anyone who would believe could be saved. All men are loved by God and have the opportunity to be saved. Man is made in God's image. God loves all men, and it is not God's will for anyone to perish in their sins.

Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus is saved.

Paul's Address In The Areopagus (Acts 17:22-34)

In Paul's sermon he went straight after the blatant idolatry in the city. He told them it was time to repent of idols and turn to God in repentance. Put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He appealed to literature the Gentiles knew, and quoted a passage which said we were the offspring of God. Since this aligned with the biblical narrative of man created in the image of God Paul used it to teach that God was our creator. God created all things and cannot be contained by what the hands of men create. Men create gods or idols in their own image or in the image of animals. But the living God created man.

The pinnacle of this sermon was when Paul told them that judgment day was coming. God will judge the world and every man in the world who ever lived. God will judge the world by his son Jesus Christ whom he raised from the dead. When Paul got to the truth of the resurrection there were people who mocked him. Others, however, believed the gospel and followed Paul. The names of the believers were listed for us in this passage. How would you like your name listed in the Holy Bible? How would you like God to write your name down in a book that will last forever? Guess what? If you believe in Jesus he did write your name down in a book. That book is called the Lamb's book of life.

In this corrupt generation another truth we want to glean from this passage is this: "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth". All ethnic groups had the same origin. We all originated from the same blood. We all bleed red blood. We are all one people, no matter what our cultural, language, or religious background. We are all human beings made in the image of God. This biblical truth cancels out all movements based on racism. It is all a lie of the devil. The Bible has the truth if men will read the Bible and believe what God said.

Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose from the dead on the third day. He is risen! Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

Different Seasons In Ministry – Acts Chapter 18

Paul Ministered In Corinth (Acts 18:1-11)

Paul left Athens and arrived in the city of Corinth. Here he met Aquila and Priscilla who were also believers in the Lord and shared Paul's vocation of tent making. He stayed with them for a while. He continued to preach the gospel in the local synagogues. Paul experienced success and the Lord gave him a vision to let him know to stay there because the Lord had a work for him in Corinth. In Corinth a church was born and we have two of Paul's letters in the New Testament to this church.

Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Corinth. He continued to preach to the Jews but when they firmly rejected the gospel then Paul declared he would turn to the Gentiles in that area. This was in keeping with Paul's regular pattern of ministry. He would take the gospel to the Jews first, but when they rejected the message he turned to preaching the gospel to the Gentiles.

After he left the Jewish synagogue Paul joined a Gentile man named Justus. The synagogue ruler, Crispus, also became a Christian and was baptized. The Lord encouraged Paul through a vision not to be afraid and not hold back but keep preaching. The Lord reassured Paul that no one would hurt him. Paul continued to preach in that area for a year and six months.

The Lord speaks! The Lord spoke to Paul, and he speaks to any Christian who will listen and do what he says. Let us remember that the Lord is involved in our daily lives. Be faithful to do the work the Lord assigns to you to do. Don't be afraid of people and what they might do, but be faithful to God's calling on your life. You never know who God might put in your path.

Some of the people Paul met in Corinth were key people in the church. Aquila and Priscilla were key in God's plan, and probably spent a lot of time on a daily basis with Paul and learned from him and were disciples by him. Not all ministry takes place from behind a pulpit. The people you work with are important to the Lord as well. Family, friends, acquaintances, coworkers, are all important to the Lord. Don't miss out on opportunities to be a witness for the Lord.

Paul Before Galileo (Acts 18:12-17)

Once again the time came when the Jews tried to rise up against Paul and persecute him for preaching the gospel. However, this time the Gentile government did not go along with the Jews who wanted to persecute Paul.

Their persecution backfired and those who wanted Paul in court got kicked out of the courtroom. When this happened, Paul's persecutors were attacked by Gentiles. The judge over the court, Gallio, did not care. He did not want any of this in his court.

This showed how God protected Paul by using a careless and apathetic judge. The Jews sought leverage against Paul by using the court system but it backfired on them. The Lord is able to protect his people in order to accomplish his will and purpose. The Lord had a purpose for Paul to preach in Corinth and he would see it done. Nobody could stop Paul as long as God wanted Paul in Corinth.

This should give us encouragement. We can be fearless in the face of opposition. If the Lord wants us to endure in a situation he can intervene. He can provide us with the grace we need, and he can work in the lives of even wicked people to help his servants. I've actually seen some of this in my own life. I've seen God use wicked people to help me against their own will. The Lord is able to carry out his work and even use unbelievers sometimes.

The Lord is over all. He is over human judges and courts. He is over the nations, over governments, over all of this world system. The nations are like a drop in a bucket to him. The Lord is king forever.

Paul Returned To Antioch (Acts 18:18-22)

Aquila and Priscilla became serious coworkers with Paul. They accompanied him when he left Corinth. Paul traveled through Syria to Ephesus. He spent time there and preached the gospel. He encouraged the church. They wanted him to stay but Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem. Paul took off in a ship, landed at Caesarea, and then went down to Antioch. He traveled around and encouraged churches. He helped people as he headed toward Jerusalem.

When I read these details of Paul's travels it reminds me that God has different seasons in our life. We may live in one place for a while, and then travel on to another place. There are different seasons in life. We may not always know why or understand what we have accomplished in a particular place. Sometimes the enemy has attacked me with the thought that I've never accomplished much because I've moved around a lot in my life. Moving around a lot does not mean a person is unstable. It might mean that God has a purpose for certain people to go to various places, like Paul did. The world measures stability with their own measuring stick. But the Lord has a different way of measuring our lives. We can trust in the Lord with our lives, even when we ourselves don't understand why we have lived in so many different places.

Paul was interested in visiting different places in order to bless the church and encourage believers. He had a heart to bless and build up the church in all the places he went to.

May the Lord give us a heart to be a blessing to the church as well, and that we would seek to intercede and pray for God's people.

Paul's Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23-28)

After Paul finished in Antioch he traveled on throughout the region, in Galatia and Phrygia in order to strengthen and build up the disciples.

Meanwhile we are introduced to another man who preached the gospel. This man was Apollos and he was bold in preaching the gospel in the synagogue, but he only knew the gospel as far as John the Baptist preached. Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and discipled him and taught him the gospel more fully as they learned from the apostle Paul. Apollos graciously received their instruction and grew stronger in the Lord and continued to preach the word. Apollos mightily convinced the Jews publicly from the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

Paul mentioned Apollos in his letters to the Corinthians. God raised up more men like Paul to preach the gospel. Paul was happy about this because he understood that this was not the job of just one man. Paul looked at himself and Apollos as fellow workers in God's field. They would plant the word in

people, and then God made that word grow and bring forth life in those who heard and believed. This showed Paul's humility and also he had to correct the churches about lifting up one man over another man. Of course, looking back through church history we see that by and large the church has not understood this word from Paul. Most of what we see today as denominations is a result of Christians following after men.

We should work together for the building up of the Lord's church. Unfortunately, most Christians I've met have no interest in working together with others. They would rather have their own castle and sit as ruler over their own little church. There is little cooperation happening.

Perhaps this will change. The world is in a state of upheaval at the moment. Perhaps this upheaval will bring the church to repentance and humility and there will be room enough for all God's workers to do the work which God called them to.

Do Not Protest – Proclaim The Gospel – Acts Chapter 19

The Holy Spirit Received At Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7)

The Pentecostal position that the baptism of the Holy Ghost is an additional experience beyond or outside of initial salvation is supported in these verses.

Paul came to Ephesus and found certain disciples who were believers. What did it take to be saved? Belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. These people were described as "disciples" so they were saved. They were Christians. But they were not baptized in the Holy Ghost.

Paul preached to them the full gospel. They were then baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. After this Paul laid hands on them and they were baptized in the Holy Ghost. What was the evidence that they were baptized in the Holy Ghost? They spoke in tongues and prophesied.

I'm sure this passage is shoe horned into the systematic theology of those who do not believe speaking in tongues is for today.

However, if a common man read this passage with no preconceived ideas or systematic theology I believe he would easily see what I see. This passage demonstrates that Christians were baptized in the Holy Ghost way past the day of Pentecost. The evidence that they were baptized in the Holy Ghost was speaking in tongues and prophesying.

There are a lot of Christians out there who work real hard to remove the supernatural from the modern church. Those who reject the baptism of the Holy Ghost and speaking in tongues twist these scriptures. These scriptures speak plainly. A common man who read this would believe.

This is why church can be dangerous, and it can be dangerous to study systematic bible theology. It is better to read the Bible for yourself and ask the Holy Spirit to interpret God's word for you.

Have you received the Holy Ghost baptism since you believed? Are you a Christian but never had this supernatural experience of the baptism of God's Holy Ghost? Have you never spoken with tongues?

Have you never prophesied? Do you have no desire in your heart to experience all that God has available for you in his finished and completed work?

Zechariah 4:6, "...Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts."

Ephesians 5:18, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;"

Acts 2:39, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call."

Paul Ministered In Ephesus (Acts 19:8-12)

There is a pattern repeated through the book of Acts. People were given an opportunity to hear the gospel and believe, but if they aggressively rejected the gospel Paul moved on. I think this is a good example to follow. There are people who are given chance after chance to believe the Bible but reject it. It is time to move on to other people then. Don't continue to witness to people who repeatedly reject the gospel. Pray for them and move on.

I think this is a mistake we can make with our families sometimes. Naturally, people love their family members, but there is a point that we need to stop witnessing. It can actually hurt people if we keep after them. Pray for them and wait for the Lord to soften their hearts. They may never receive the truth, and we have to come to grips with that reality. Not everyone will believe the gospel and be saved.

We only have so much time to preach the gospel and share God's word with people. If the ground we plant in does not respond to the seed then we move on to other ground that will receive God's word. Some people tend to get stuck in a situation where the enemy drains them of all resources. It is time to move on.

This takes wisdom from the Lord. Don't let the enemy condemn you if you move on to a new situation because of the gospel. When people reject the truth then we need to move on to a new situation where we can help people who will receive.

The Sons Of Sceva (Acts 19:13-20)

The name of the Lord Jesus was famous by this time. Sons of Sceva thought they might add the name of the Lord to their toolbox of spiritual powers. However, they did not fully comprehend the spiritual power they dealt with. When they attempted to drive out demons with the name of Jesus they came against demons who did not recognize their spiritual authority. This teaches us something important about spiritual warfare.

What was the lesson? It was not good enough to attach the phrase "in Jesus name" at the end of prayer. The person who invoked the name of Jesus must also live for the Lord Jesus. We must be "in Christ Jesus" in order to have the authority of his name. Someone who tried to use the Lord Jesus like a magical word finds that it will backfire, as these men learned. The Lord Jesus is not a magical word. He is a person. Those who have his authority are those who live for him.

Another lesson we can learn is the reality of demons. These demons spoke and knew who Jesus was and they knew who Paul was. Demons have knowledge of people and knowledge of the spiritual world. When people seek out spiritual knowledge outside of God's word demons will oblige. They lie, deceive, and destroy anyone who seeks them out. This is why God's word forbids people to practice witchcraft and fortune telling. These demons will destroy anyone who seeks them out. I've heard enough testimonies of people who were saved out of that lifestyle that I don't want any part of it. I am content with God's word, the Holy Bible, and trusting in God for my life and future. My life is in God's hands. I don't need to know what will happen to me. All I need to know is that God will provide for me, he will protect me, and he will be my portion forever.

There is power in the name of Jesus to cast out devils, but the person who tries to do this better be living for Jesus themselves. Make sure you are underneath the Lord's authority in your life before you try to exercise the authority of the name of Jesus. We need to make sure our life is totally surrendered to the Lord Jesus Christ. Nobody is perfect, of course, but you know if you are in Christ. The Holy Spirit will bear witness with your spirit that you belong to Jesus.

Remember God's word. James 4:7, "*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*" Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4)

The Riot In Ephesus (Acts 19:21-41)

By this time in his life Paul knew that he would go back to Jerusalem and after that he wanted to go to Rome. He sent for some of his fellow workers who were Timothy and Erastus.

Meanwhile there was a silversmith named Demetrius in Ephesus who realized Paul's preaching the gospel hurt his business. These silversmiths made shrines for the false god Diana. Demetrius organized a protest against Paul and his fellow workers who preached the gospel. As a result, a mob formed and there was confusion everywhere. This is a device of Satan. When you see mobs like this you can know that the devil is in the middle of it. Anywhere people are in the streets rioting and protesting you can be assured the devil is not far off.

This angry mob directed their fury towards those who preached the gospel. They chanted praise to their false god Diana. This shows us how men seek to overthrow the truth of God. They replace the gospel with a false religion. We see this demonstrated in modern America with the movement to create a false religion of social justice. People build a social religion out of racism and other lies and delusions of the devil.

Ultimately all protests and riots are not what they appear. These people appeared to be promoting Diana, but the real spirit behind them wanted to destroy Paul and his fellow coworkers. The evil spirit tried to stop the proclamation of the gospel in Ephesus. Underneath what you see in America is an attempt to destroy Christians and to stop the gospel in America. This is at heart an attack against Christians and the church. Don't be deceived by what you see on the surface. The true spirit behind anarchy and rebellion is always an attack against God and God's people.

Paul wanted to preach the gospel, but his friends stopped him from risking his life. He probably would have been killed by the mob. Paul's attitude shows us the true attitude of Christians. They want to

proclaim the truth, and tell people about Jesus. The true answer for the world, and society is not protest but proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved.

Miracles In The Church – Acts Chapter 20

Paul In Macedonia And Greece (Acts 20:1-6)

Paul traveled to various cities. Where he went the Jews followed and persecuted him. There was a growing number of disciples who were coworkers with Paul in the ministry. They helped in practical ways by providing material support and assisted him in the work. Paul slowly made his way toward Jerusalem. Some of the people listed were also mentioned by Paul in his letters to the churches.

What does this tell us about the Bible and these events? This is a record of historical facts. We have a list of cities, towns, regions, people. There is a lot of detail provided that could be verified. If the Bible was not true it would not include such information which could be verified. We have a wealth of information to provide historical proof of the truth in the Holy Bible.

One reason Paul moved around was that he returned to churches he went to before. A lot of these churches he helped start. He returned to these churches to encourage, exhort, and build the faith of the believers. His goal was to build, encourage, and comfort God's people. This should be our goal today as well. We are to pray for the church, share God's word, and seek to build, encourage, and comfort God's people.

I am strengthened in my faith in the message of the gospel by reading this passage. The Lord Jesus was crucified on a cross outside Jerusalem. He died on that cross. He was buried in a rich man's tomb. He rose from the dead three days later. He was seen by his disciples and apostles. He ascended back to heaven after he gave them instructions. We are told that Jesus will return to earth in the same manner he left. He will return. He will establish his kingdom upon this earth and rule over the nations with a rod of iron. Just as surely as these historical events were true, so also the future events spoken of by the Bible will also happen.

Eutychus Revived At Troas (Acts 20:7-12)

A young man, Eutychus, listened to Paul preach so long he went to sleep and fell out of a window. He was dead when he hit the ground. But Paul went down and the man revived. He was dead from the fall, but came back to life when Paul went down to retrieve him. What did they do after this? Paul went back to preaching until the morning and then he left. This true story is "stranger than fiction". It happened.

What can we learn from this? We get a glimpse into a church that stayed up all night listening to Paul preach the word to them. These people did not have a church service like modern people think of church. These people were meeting in homes, eating meals together, and preaching the word of God all night long.

The supernatural happened in this church. It was a common occurrence for miracles to happen. Here was a man who died during the church service and then came back to life. Everyone just continued with the church service. They had a meal and then Paul continued preaching until morning.

Our modern "play" church has no resemblance to this primitive church. This church was born in the fire of the Holy Ghost, but today we live in the smoke of man-made tradition and ceremony. May God deliver us from dead religion and raise us to new life in the Spirit in these last days. Perhaps our modern church needs to fall out of a window so it can be raised to new life and so continue until the day dawns and the morning star arises in our hearts.

May the Lord's will be done. May we see revival again in our day.

From Troas To Miletus (Acts 20:13-16)

Here are more details of Paul's travel arrangements. The part which stands out to me in this section is the determination Paul had to be in Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost. Why was Paul determined to get to Jerusalem? Why did he need to get there by the day of Pentecost?

I think the reason Paul wanted to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost was because of the opportunity this presented for preaching the gospel. As we know from the beginning of the book of Acts people from all over the world gathered in Jerusalem at Pentecost. This was the same time of year the Holy Spirit fell upon the original apostles and early church and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke with tongues, and prophesied. It was on that day Peter preached and many people were saved. Perhaps Paul saw this as another opportunity to preach the gospel and win many souls into the kingdom of God.

As we have seen these ministry teams were strategic in outreach. They tried to reach as many people as possible with the gospel. They had a regular pattern in ministry of going to the local Jewish synagogue, preaching the gospel, and depending on the response, continue in that town or they would leave for the next town.

I think this is exactly what we see here in Paul's determination to go to Jerusalem. His desire was to reach as many people as possible at that time of the year in a city where many people would be gathered from all over the world.

The great commission is to reach all the nations with the gospel. Going into the city of Jerusalem was a strategic way of reaching all those nations.

May the Lord give us wisdom today on how we can reach as many people as possible with the gospel.

Paul's Farewell To The Ephesians (Acts 20:17-38)

In this section we come to a turning point in Paul's ministry. He told the elders from Ephesus that he would not see them again. He was going to Jerusalem and he knew that difficulties and persecution awaited him there. However, he was not moved by the prospect of difficulty but determined to finish the work which the Lord Jesus gave him.

Paul testified that he had a clear conscience about his ministry among them. He did not covet anyone's material resources, but instead he supported himself and those who were with him. He did not take from them but he gave the gospel and his own life.

He warned the elders from Ephesus that men would infiltrate the church and try to lead people astray. Paul called these men grievous wolves and men who would speak perverse things to deceive people and make disciples out of people in the church. Paul could have been speaking about all of church history, because this prophecy was played out many times in church history and still today.

Paul prayed with them, cried with him, hugged them, and then said goodbye to them. He knew he would not be back to that place again. He knew his future was in Jerusalem and in Rome.

There are different seasons in life. We may spend years in one location serving the Lord but then he moves us on to another place. We have to remain flexible and open to where the Lord wants to take us.

Despite knowing that he faced difficulty Paul was determined to obey God. We have to make that same decision. No matter how hard life may get we must determine to keep walking by faith and trusting in the Lord Jesus. The Lord will get us through. He is our provider, he is our protector, and he is our portion forever.

The Persecuted Preacher – Acts Chapter 21

Paul's Journey To Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-7)

On Paul's journey to Jerusalem he met Christians who warned him about what was in front of him at Jerusalem. Paul's trip plans are given to us in an exact list of cities and towns he went through and the route he took toward Jerusalem. These Christians warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

Did Paul make a mistake? I've heard preachers say Paul was wrong in his determination to go to Jerusalem. I disagree. The Lord Jesus told his disciples they would suffer from religious persecution. It is part of serving the Lord Jesus in this hostile world system.

I think the Holy Spirit told Paul what was in front of him in the same way the Lord Jesus warned his disciples that they would suffer tribulation in this world. It was to be expected.

The Lord told us about it ahead of time so that when we face opposition we will not be surprised or offended. (John 16:1) The Lord told us ahead of time so we could decide for ourselves if the cost was worth it to us. For Paul, no matter what the price, he was willing to pay it so he could fulfill God's calling on his life.

People who say Paul was wrong in his determination to go to Jerusalem are the same as those who think that suffering should not be a part of the Christian life.

The Psalmist taught us that affliction was part of God's work in our life. Before I was afflicted I went astray. But now (that I have suffered) I have learned to keep God's word. (Psalm 119:71)

Suffering is like a fire which burns away the chaff in our lives. It removes the things of this world which hinder us in serving God. Suffering helps us to get a clear perspective on what living for Jesus is all about.

This is why I have always enjoyed about reading biographies of Christians who went through trials and came out with a strong faith.

It gives clarity when we see that God's word is true no matter what we suffer or go through. God's word does not change. God sustains us in every trial we face.

Jesus said in this world we face tribulation. (John 16:33) But we can be of good cheer because Jesus overcame this world. And in him we too have overcome the world.

Paul Visited Philip The Evangelist (Acts 21:8-16)

As we previously saw the Lord continued to paint a grim picture for Paul of what waited him in Jerusalem. Isn't this what the Lord said he would do? Way back when Paul first got saved the Lord Jesus spoke to Ananias and said, "*...he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.*" (Acts 9:15-16) This just was a further confirmation to me that it was God's will for Paul to go to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit confirmed what the Lord Jesus already said.

The Holy Spirit used prophets to graphically portray what would happen to Paul after he arrived in Jerusalem. The Lord let him know what would happen. Why does God tell us ahead of time when bad things will happen? He does so in order to prepare us. He does so that we choose to continue the road to Calvary. The Lord does not hide anything for those who serve him. Genesis 18:17, "*And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;*"

The Lord revealed his secrets unto his servants the prophets. The Lord did not hide what he would do. The Lord speaks to us even to this day. Those who listen to the Lord and obey him will hear him speak. Jesus knows his sheep. His sheep hear his voice and they follow him.

The Lord used prophets in the church then and still does today. I think it is a tragedy that men promote false doctrines in the church which deny that God can speak to us today. It is a tragedy that people in the church deny the work of all God's gifts to the church.

Philip the evangelist was one of the seven deacons appointed by the apostles to look after tables. Philip was one of those deacons who served alongside Stephen the martyr. Now we learn more about him and his house. He had daughters who were prophets. We see from this that prophets are men and women. Prophets are not over people in the church. They are not in authority in the church. They are not leaders in the church. They come alongside leaders in the church in order to build, exhort, and comfort God's people. This is similar to the function of prophets in the Old Testament how you often see their ministry of speaking to kings in order to build, exhort, or comfort.

The ministry of the prophet is rejected so many times. But we see here the ministry of prophets was active in the primitive church. It makes me wonder what happened that people deny the gift of apostles and prophets today? I wonder why we went astray on this?

Paul was determined to continue on the path he was set on. This was God's will for Paul. God spoke to him, let him know what would happen in order to prepare him, and gave him the resolve to continue forward no matter what.

May the Lord give us this same resolve in our life and ministry to go forward no matter what opposition we face.

Paul's Arrival At Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-26)

The apostles in Jerusalem received Paul gladly when he arrived. Paul shared with them what happened through his ministry among the Gentiles. When they heard Paul's report they glorified the Lord.

There was a strange turn in this account. The leaders in Jerusalem were concerned about the multitude of Jews who became believers in Jesus but still held their Jewish tradition. These Jewish Christians did not like Paul because they thought Paul was against the Jewish people. Of course, this was a misunderstanding and a twisting of Paul's message.

The enemy always takes some small controversy and turns it into the only thing people know about a man or his ministry.

However, we know from the record in this book of Acts that Paul went so far as to circumcise Timothy to avoid this controversy. Paul did not tell Jews to stop being Jews. He was against Jews telling Gentiles they needed to become Jews in order to be a Christian. Becoming a Jew to become a Christian was not the gospel. Paul was against those who tried to make Gentile Christians into Jews. It was not needed, it was not necessary, and it was dangerous.

Eventually, the Jewish culture evaporated from the church as it went forward. The church started out Jewish, but it soon outgrew that old wine skin. As Jesus pointed out, new wine must be poured into new wine skins. You cannot pour the Holy Spirit into old religious traditions and culture.

They asked Paul to prove to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem that he did not preach against Moses. They asked him to perform some Jewish tradition in the temple, and Paul agreed to do so. As far as it was in Paul's power he wanted to live at peace with all men. He did not want to be a stumbling block to prevent other people from coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

As we shall see, however, this act of appeasement would backfire. You can't really change people's minds once they decide what they believe. People decided they did not like Paul. This was something promoted by the devil. Religious cities and buildings attract evil spirits. The fastest way to destroy people is through the promotion of false religion and spiritual delusion.

Paul followed their instructions and did what they asked him to do. He humbled himself and was willing to submit to the advice of brothers in Christ. Paul already knew, though, how this would end up. He knew because the Holy Spirit already showed him what would happen.

Paul Seized At The Temple (Acts 21:27-36)

Paul almost completed the seven days at the temple when Jews from Asia spotted him. From the description it sounded like they spied on him and finally caught him in the temple. They made false accusations against him and stirred up the crowd to riot against Paul. Paul might have been killed then by the mob but Roman soldiers heard the commotion and intervened. They chained Paul and took him to the castle to save him from the mob.

Here was the beginning of what the Holy Spirit said would happen to Paul in Jerusalem. Paul tried to appease the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem but was detected by the Jews. These Jews were against Christians like Saul of Tarsus had been and they were determined to take out Paul. They might have thought he was their ring leader.

All the city was moved. This one man, Paul, inspired an entire city wide riot. That is kind of amazing if you think about it. The devil was so threatened by the ministry of Paul that he stirred up the entire city to kill the apostle Paul.

The early church was filled with the power of the Holy Ghost. As a result, those who did not believe were filled with Satan. There was no neutral ground in the battle. Do people today think there is neutral ground in this spiritual battle? There is no neutral ground in the battle against the powers of darkness. The devil and his demons will never repent or change their mind. (Revelation 9:21) They are determined to destroy man and do all they can to hurt God.

As we saw with the Lord Jesus all the evil men do God turns around for good in order to bring about great salvation. It was through this tribulation which Paul endured that the gospel was spread from one end of the world to the other and through Paul's years of suffering in prison we have his letters which make a major part of the New Testament. All things work together for the good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Paul Addressed The Crowd (Acts 21:37-40)

The Romans who intervened and rescued Paul from the crowd did not know who he was. Paul talked to the chief captain and asked to speak. The chief captain was surprised he could speak Greek. He thought he was an Egyptian trouble maker. Already they made assumptions on who they thought Paul was. After Paul explained to him that he was a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, he was given permission by the Roman captain to speak to the people. Paul stood on the stairs and beckoned to the people with his hand. When the crowd was quiet Paul spoke to them in the Hebrew tongue.

After the crowd nearly beat him to death Paul's only thought was to share his testimony. He wanted the people to be saved. This was the same attitude Stephen had when he preached to the Jews who persecuted him. This was the same attitude Jesus had on the cross when he prayed for the forgiveness of those who crucified him.

Any true Christian who has the Holy Spirit living in him will love his enemies. This is the attitude and heart of God. God loves us, even though we are enemies against the Lord. He died for us even when we

were still his enemies. He has provided forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God the Father. We have been washed and cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

Paul understood the people who persecuted him. He was one of them. He did the same thing they now did to him. If anyone understood them it was Paul. This was perhaps another reason why he was determined to preach the gospel to them. He desperately wanted them to believe the good news. He knew how Jesus changed his life. His desire was for each person in that crowd to be saved just like he was saved.

Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

The Mob Versus The Gospel – Acts Chapter 22

Paul's Defense To The Crowd (Acts 22:1-21)

The crowd was quiet for a few minutes to listen to Paul's defense. Instead of defending himself he gave his testimony of how he was saved. Why did Paul do this? Because he understood exactly why they persecuted him. He did the same thing once. He also persecuted Christians and was there when Stephen was martyred. He knew how much Jesus changed his life, and his heart went out to these people that they could also hear the voice of the Lord, and receive salvation, and believe upon the name of Jesus.

They listened to him to a point. When Paul mentioned the gospel would go to the Gentiles they turned on him again. This crowd was against the Gentiles, as well as Jesus, and if Paul would bring the gospel to the Gentiles they would oppose him. This was a pattern of opposition consistent through the ministry of Paul. His greatest enemy when he preached was the Jewish people. They would follow him from one city to another in order to oppose him and his message. However, this did not change the fact that the gospel went first to the Jews and then also the Gentiles. The Jews were still loved by God. God still had a plan for the nation of Israel. One day all Israel will be saved. (Romans 11:26)

Paul did not defend himself. He defended the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul's one thought was for the salvation of the people who wanted to kill him. He understood them, he loved them, and he would have them saved like himself. Later Paul would express this love for his fellow countrymen in Romans 9:1-4.

Anyone who hates the Jew because of their persecution of Christians does not understand the love of God. God loves his enemies. Jesus prayed for those who crucified him that God would forgive them, because they did not know what they did. There is a spiritual blindness upon Jews from the time of Christ until now. We cannot understand this. But it is not a reason to hate these people. They are loved by God. And God's promises to the nation of Israel will be fulfilled.

May the Lord give us a heart to pray for Israel. We are commanded in the Bible to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May God fill our heart with love and compassion for this nation and people that are so loved by the Lord.

Paul The Roman Citizen - (Acts 22:22-30)

When the crowd would not be pacified by Paul's speech the Romans took him and would beat him. However, Paul knew it was not lawful for them to beat a Roman citizen. He informed them of his citizenship. This had a remarkable effect upon them and they did not beat him. They released him. Paul told them he was a citizen of Rome by birth. The captain released him from chains but kept him in custody. They had to find out what the commotion was about so the Romans brought Paul to a religious meeting of the Jews.

This back and forth between Jews and Romans reminds me of what happened with the Lord Jesus. What principle does this teach us? In order for persecution to happen against Christians there must be some kind of moral outrage which then leverages the power of government to sanction persecution against Christians.

I wonder if this is what we see right now in America with the outrage. There is a new religion of social justice. This religion is of the mob and Christianity is rejected. It is the religion of the mob and anarchists. It is sweeping through every aspect of America. It will only be a matter of time before this is funneled into persecution against churches, God, Christians, and anything resembling Western Judaeo-Christian culture.

What is our response? It is the same response Paul had. It is the same response Jesus had. Our response is to walk in love, mercy, grace, compassion, and forgiveness. It is our job to continue proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the gospel which has the power of God to change people. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can truly change a man's heart. The root of the problem is not racism or injustice. The root of the problem is sin. Men worship themselves. Outrage, anger, and violence is just another form of self worship. It does not solve anything but only throws gasoline on the fire. This is what the devil wants. He wants it to just all burn to the ground. But the solution for America is simple. Repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ. Only the Lord Jesus can change us and save us.

A Witness To Small And Great – Acts Chapter 23

Paul Before The Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1-11)

The Romans brought Paul to a religious council to figure out what he did to stir up a riot. The first thing Paul said was that he lived in good conscience before God.

What did this mean? Did it mean Paul never sinned? Did it mean he was morally perfect? No, it meant Paul obtained forgiveness of his sins through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul knew Christ died for his sins and had risen again from the dead. Death no longer had any power over the Lord Jesus and no longer had power over those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

When Paul stated this the high priest commanded that someone punch him in the mouth. Paul then rebuked the high priest. Paul didn't realize he was the high priest, and retracted his rebuke when someone told him the man was a high priest.

At that point Paul saw his way of escape. Half those gathered were Pharisees and half were Sadducees. There was no better way of distracting a crowd like this than to get them focused on what they disagreed on. Paul knew they would argue over their theological differences. They would forget all

about him. That was exactly what he did, and it worked. It worked so well the Romans came back to rescue Paul again because the council started to riot.

The Pharisees were on Paul's side because they believed in angels and spirits, but the Sadducees did not believe in the supernatural. As a result of the dissension the chief captain got Paul out of there by force and brought him back to the castle.

The Lord stood by Paul. Perhaps Paul was tempted to get discouraged by all of these events but the Lord said to him, "Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." With this word from the Lord Paul knew he would not die in Jerusalem. He knew he would testify in this city, but that he would also travel to Rome to preach the gospel there also.

The Lord knows when we need a word of encouragement. I've experienced this a few times in my life. When I needed God to encourage me and comfort me he was always faithful to show up and help me. The Lord is touched by the feeling of our weakness. He knows we are dust. God's love never ends and his mercy is new every morning. Great is his faithfulness. Amen.

The Plot To Kill Paul (Acts 23:12-22)

A group of forty Jews swore an oath that they would not eat food until they murdered the apostle Paul. This should give us a clear picture of how insane the persecution against Christians was in the early church. Is it like that today? From all indications, even though you never hear about it in the news, there is just as much persecution against Christians today as there ever was in the past.

These men made an oath to kill Paul. They placed themselves under a curse that they would kill Paul or they would not eat food. Of course, the plot failed, because the Lord would not allow it to happen. If those who swore this oath stood by it then they all died from starvation.

How was this plot foiled? A relative of Paul heard about it and sent a young boy to tell Paul. Paul sent the boy, by way of a guard, to the chief captain to tell him about this plot. God used a boy to put a stop to the plan of the Jews to kill Paul.

The history of Israel is filled with accounts of God delivering his people. The book of Esther is a good example of how God delivered his people out of the hand of their enemies and even brought the plot of the enemy back upon them.

Paul was not worried. He had a word from the Lord that he travel to Rome. He knew that whatever plot the Jews came up with it would fail even though it would cause him to suffer for a while as he remained in captivity. This protective custody of the Romans turned into a long imprisonment for Paul but also provided opportunities to witness to small and great alike of the Lord Jesus.

No weapon formed against us shall prosper. All those who rise up against us shall fall. I will not fear what the devil may bring. Why? Because I am a child of God. Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world.

Paul Sent To Felix (Acts 23:23-35)

The chief captain supervising Paul's situation commanded a small army to escort Paul to Caesarea. This was for Paul's protection but also an effort to transfer this problem up the chain to his superiors.

His superior was Felix. Felix asked Paul what province he was from since he was Roman. Paul said Cilicia and Felix agreed he would hear his case when the accusers arrived.

The letter the chief captain sent to Felix was partly true. He gave himself credit for rescuing Paul because Paul was a Roman but the fact was the man did not know Paul was a Roman until he was about to beat the truth out of Paul.

He used this letter as a way to legally cover his own mistakes but also provided Paul with a small army to protect him from the assassins who waited to kill him.

Felix kept Paul in Herod's judgment hall.

One step at a time Paul was closer to the goal of Rome. God intended to use the Roman government to provide Paul with protection, provision, and a means of transportation across the world to the Roman capital.

This solution took time. There was an extended period which Paul spent in custody with the Romans before he was sent to Rome. During that time, Paul shared God's word and his testimony with people. He had a chance to witness to small and great men. This was according to God's will.

The Lord told him the destination but did not tell him how long it would take or by what means he would get there. This is an important lesson for us. We don't always know the means whereby the Lord is going to get us from one season in life to the next. He will do it, that's for sure, but we don't always know in what way we will get to this next chapter of life.

If God has to use an army and the government to get us where we are supposed to be then he will do it. In the days of Jacob and his sons God used a world wide famine to move the sons of Jacob down to Egypt. God can accomplish his will in our life by whatever means he wants to. At times, he may move mountains to get you where you need to be. Trust in the Lord, and continue to walk by faith. The Lord is faithful and he will see to it.

Paul's Message – Acts Chapter 24

Tertullus Prosecutes Paul (Acts 24:1-9)

The Jews brought accusations against the apostle Paul. What were the charges? Sedition, a leader of Christians, and profaning the temple. Tertullus said the Jews would have handled Paul themselves if the Romans had not inserted themselves into the situation.

What was being said was mostly lies. Paul was not guilty of sedition or profaning the temple. The only thing said here which was true was that Paul was a leader of the Christians. The solution that Jews had for Paul was martyrdom. But the Lord was not yet finished with the apostle Paul.

The Lord promised Paul he would show him how he would suffer for his name. Some people say that Paul suffered because of his sins, but that is contrary to the gospel Paul preached. What is the gospel? Christ died for our sins, he was buried, he rose again on the third day. The Lord Jesus took upon himself the punishment of all our sins. When we repent and put our faith in Jesus all of our sins are washed away in the blood of the Lamb. Our sins are removed from us as far as the east is from the west, never to be remembered no more by God. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

Why did Paul suffer? Because he lived in a world that hates God. The religious and secular arms of the world system are dead set against the living God revealed in Jesus Christ. They will not accept the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet he is the one in whom God has said will sit upon the throne forever. Jesus is King forever and ever. There is no other king. Anyone who does not believe the gospel will suffer the punishment of their own sins. When we reject the free offer of God's grace then we accept the responsibility of our own sins. We pay for our own sins. The penalty for our sins will not be satisfied even after an eternity in the lake of fire. There is no end to the punishment of sin. God will never stop hating sin. He will not stop hating anyone who rejects his son Jesus Christ. There is no end to that punishment. It is eternal.

This is why every person needs to cry out to Jesus and be saved. It is the mission of every born again Christian to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. We only have a short time to preach the message. The night is coming when no one will be able to work any longer. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Paul's Defense to Felix (Acts 24:10-21)

Paul's defense went straight to the heart of the gospel. His only desire was the opportunity in this court to lift up the name of Jesus Christ and make everything in this court about the gospel.

Paul said he stood there because of his faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I doubt the Jewish lawyer Tertullus expected Paul to use this occasion as a pulpit for preaching the gospel. This was in keeping with what the Lord Jesus promised would happen when Christians were put into this exact situation. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would put words in the mouth of Christians who were examined in this manner.

The Holy Spirit points to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit lifts up the name of Jesus. The Holy Spirit gives Christians the wisdom to testify and preach the gospel in any situation they are in. The Lord stood with Paul and strengthened him so the message would be heard by Jew and Gentile in that court room.

Notice Tertullus made this all about Paul and Paul made this all about Jesus. Tertullus was focused on Paul but Paul did not think about himself. Paul thought about the Lord Jesus who spoke to him on the road to Damascus. Paul remembered the word of the Lord Jesus and his heart filled with the message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Does our heart burn with the message of the gospel? When we have an opportunity to share God's word with others what do we talk about? Do we talk about ourselves? Or do we talk about Jesus?

Jesus Christ is Lord. He died on the cross for our sins, he was buried in a tomb, and he rose from the dead on the third day. God the Father placed us into Christ. The Lord Jesus is our righteousness, wisdom, and sanctification. He is all we need.

The Verdict Postponed (Acts 24:22-27)

Paul was held for two years in protective custody of the Romans. Felix kept listening to Paul's account over and over. The scripture says that Felix hoped for some kind of bribe from Paul. However, there was a point at which Paul's preaching got to him and he could not take the conviction. Felix trembled and dismissed Paul and said that he would call for him at a more convenient time. Obviously Felix had no motivation to release Paul or let him go, and so kept him in custody. He was not unkind to Paul and allowed Paul's friends to minister to his needs, but would not allow him to go free.

This situation might seem unjust and unfair to Paul but remember that Paul served the Lord in this situation. He was not there for himself or to forward his own agenda. He was there in service to the Lord Jesus. During that time when he testified to Felix there was no doubt people in that place listened to the gospel and were saved. People became Christians right under the nose of Felix in that courtroom.

The time came when Felix was replaced by another man named Porcius Festus. Felix could have let Paul go but the scripture says he left him in custody to show the Jews a favor. This shows how fickle and unreliable this man was.

Justice does not come from men no matter what their position is. True justice only comes from God and it only comes in God's time.

What would happen if Paul got justice from God? He would have been struck down a long time before this because he killed Christians and persecuted the church. What if men always received immediate justice? Not many men would be left on the face of the earth.

The Lord Jesus demonstrated God's justice upon Calvary. He died in our place. Those who want justice should look to Calvary. Jesus died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day. He satisfied God's wrath for all of us. Instead of crying out for justice, we should humble ourselves and cry out for God's mercy upon ourselves and everyone we come into contact with. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Paul Preached To Gentile Kings – Acts Chapter 25

Paul's Trial Before Festus (Acts 25:1-9)

The same plot to kill Paul on the road between Caesarea and Jerusalem was attempted again under Festus as it was when the chief captain originally sent Paul under protection to Felix. Festus assumed his role in this region. While he was in Jerusalem the Jews tried to persuade him to have Paul transported to Jerusalem, and their plan was to kill Paul on the road. Maybe Festus knew this was their plan. He did not give in to their request but told them to meet him in the courtroom at Caesarea where Paul was already kept in protective custody.

When Festus got to Caesarea he called the court into session and brought out Paul. The Jews were there to accuse and slander Paul to Festus. Paul denied their charges, and the Jews could not prove their accusations against Paul.

Festus was inclined to give in to the Jews and have Paul transported to Jerusalem. Maybe Festus knew the plot and did not care but was willing to go along with the Jews to get Paul off his plate and out of his court.

Again, we see an innocent man is falsely charged and kept in custody for years for no reason except the corruption of those in power. Sound familiar? It is the story of the human race. It has never changed through all of history.

Do men's hearts cry out of justice? God's desire for justice is even greater than man's desire for justice. His justice is eternal. All those who break God's law will face an eternal sentence of punishment in a lake of fire. What are the crimes of those in the lake of fire? Scripture says that all liars will have their part in the lake of fire. Have you ever told a lie? Are you sure you really want justice?

Jesus satisfied God's justice upon the cross of Calvary. Anyone who looks to the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary and believes he died for their sins will receive pardon from God. The Lord washes away our sins in the blood of his Son Jesus Christ.

Anyone who rejects the gospel will indeed get justice to their eternal regret and anguish.

The Appeal To Caesar (Acts 25:10-12)

Earlier there was an incident where 40 men waited to kill Paul on the road while he was transported between Caesarea and Jerusalem. This was under the rule of Felix. Now Festus arrived and the Jews wanted to do the same thing again. Paul knew about it. Festus knew about it, too. Why did Festus even ask Paul if he would agree to be transported back to Jerusalem? Probably because Festus could care less if Paul was assassinated by the Jews. Paul would not agree to be a martyr for the Jews, though. He appealed to Caesar, which meant he asked for the judgment of someone over Festus. I get the impression that appealing to Caesar was a risky choice to make for Paul (or he would have already done it under Felix), but now he had no choice left. Also, the Lord told Paul he would go to Rome. I wonder if Paul imagined he would travel to Rome as a prisoner on a slave ship?

This ability to appeal in court shows the Romans had a sophisticated system of justice. Roman citizens were protected by law, and could be tried, and appeal their cases in a court of law. I would imagine that a lot of what we have in our modern system of justice is derived from the Romans as well as the Greek civilizations.

Festus agreed to Paul's appeal and allowed Paul to be sent to Caesar. However, before he left, Paul would have an opportunity to testify in front of other Gentile kings.

Believers in Christ have a way to make appeals. We can take our petitions directly to God the Father because of what the Lord Jesus accomplished for us through his death, burial, and resurrection. The Lord Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. We have been provided with pardon and forgiveness because Jesus took our place upon the cross. God the Father declared us not guilty because of what Jesus did for

us. Turn to God in repentance and put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Festus Consults Agrippa (Acts 25:13-22)

King Agrippa and Bernice arrived in Caesarea to salute Festus. While they visited Festus told them about Paul's case. He shared how Felix left Paul behind as a prisoner. When Festus was in Jerusalem he was approached by the Jews about Paul's case but did not immediately hand Paul over to them. Instead, he allowed a court to be held at Caesarea to hear Paul's story. Festus was ready to hand Paul over to the Jews, but to escape that death sentence with the Jews Paul appealed to Caesar. As Festus told this story to Agrippa he called Caesar "Augustus". Festus held Paul until arrangements were made to send him to Rome. Meanwhile, Agrippa asked Festus if he would also hear Paul. He had no idea what he was in for. All of the Gentile rulers put themselves under the influence of a gospel preacher like no other.

These men were responsible for the gospel Paul preached to them. Because of their pride and position they thought they were the ones judging Paul. But it will be the gospel Paul preached which will judge them one day. This was also true when the Jews and Pilate judged Jesus. They will all be held accountable for the truth that Jesus told them. He told them he would come back on the clouds and every eye would behold him. Jesus will return to judge this earth and all the nations one day.

Paul's departure from Caesarea approached and his trip to Rome. However, before he went, he had another opportunity to preach to those unsuspecting kings.

What opportunities do we have to share the gospel? If we desire to share God's word with people the Lord will send people across our path. There has never been a time like today to share the gospel. Make the best use of the opportunities that you have to lift up the name of Jesus.

Paul Before Agrippa and Bernice (Acts 25:23-27)

Notice how the arrival of Agrippa and Bernice was described as "great pomp". In other words, it was like the circus came to town. This was a great show for people. Not only were Agrippa and Bernice invited but all the chief captains and principal men of the city. What was happening here? It was entertainment, and the show was put on by Festus for Agrippa and all these big people in the city. Who was the star of the show? None other than Paul the apostle. No doubt to the minds of these people Paul was no more than a clown in the circus to them. This demonstrates the pride of men in the face of the most important message they would ever hear in their lives.

Festus said this show was for the purpose of gaining more information so he could write an informed letter to Caesar when he sent Paul to him. Do I think this was really the case? I doubt it. All of these people were liars, deceivers, and corrupt. You can't believe anything these men said. Remember how the chief captain Lysias lied in his letter to Felix earlier? These men were clever at rewriting history and events to make themselves look good.

The heart of the plot was the Jews wanted Paul dead. However, the benevolent Festus had not found Paul worthy of death. Unfortunately, Paul appealed to Caesar, and so Festus was following the rules in sending Paul to Rome.

No matter what motive men had the Lord had Paul center stage for his own purpose. It was God's will for Paul to preach the gospel to them. God wanted them all to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. They would never be able to say after that day they did not hear the truth. God did not leave himself without a testimony. No one can say they didn't know the truth. God will not allow men to justify themselves by saying they never heard the truth. They hear it, and they reject it.

What is truth, Pilate asked. The truth is Jesus Christ. He is the way, the truth, and the life. There is no other way to find God but through Jesus Christ. Call on the name of the Lord and be saved.

Turn From Satan To God – Acts Chapter 26

Paul's Testimony To Agrippa (Acts 26:1-23)

The Lord Jesus said Paul was a chosen vessel to testify before the Jews and the Gentiles. Paul shared his testimony before the Jews, and now he shared with these Gentiles kings the same testimony. There are a few verses here that make this testimony a little bit different.

One difference is verse 18. The Lord spoke to Paul, and told him how his life would be used by God in preaching the gospel. "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."

This verse is packed with life changing truth. Let's open this up and see what we can find in this verse.

First, men in their natural state are in darkness and under the power of Satan. The entire Bible teaches this from Genesis all the way through Revelation. Man without God is in darkness and is under the power of Satan. What is the answer to this problem?

How can man be delivered from darkness and from the power of Satan? By turning to Jesus Christ by faith.

What happens as a result of turning by faith to Jesus Christ? Men receive the forgiveness of sins, and they also receive inheritance. Also, notice here that sanctification is by faith. Some think that salvation is by faith and they are right about this, but they assume that sanctification comes through self effort or trying to obey God's laws. It is not. Sanctification is by faith in Jesus as well.

Most people can understand forgiveness of sins but what does the word "inheritance" mean? This points forward to the future kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. We will be a part of that kingdom. We will participate in the Lord's government over the nations of this world and over the universe. God has a plan to give those who believe in Jesus the opportunity to participate in a future we cannot even imagine yet. What will it be like when Jesus Christ sits as king over all the nations on this earth? We are going to find out. Those who have put their faith in Jesus will have some part in that kingdom.

The gospel gives light to those who are in darkness. When we hear the gospel, and receive the message, and believe the good news then light comes into our soul. We begin to see the world and everything

around us the way it truly is. We understand people as they really are and not who they pretend to be. We no longer deceive our own heart in thinking we are something that we are not.

Remember, Paul was preaching to Gentile kings who were deep in the darkness of this world system. He almost persuaded Agrippa to become a Christian. What would it mean for Agrippa to become a Christian? It would probably mean loss of his position and power in the world system. But what would he gain? He would have the forgiveness of his sins and inheritance in God's kingdom.

Another verse which stands out to me is verse 23, "*That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.*" Christ died for our sins upon Calvary. He was buried in a tomb. He rose from the dead on the third day. By faith in what Jesus accomplished our sins are washed away, and we have hope for a future in God's kingdom.

Festus Interrupts Paul's Defense (Acts 26:24-32)

Festus interrupted Paul and called him crazy. However, Paul defended himself and said he spoke words of truth and soberness. Despite the interruption from Festus, Paul turned his attention toward King Agrippa.

Somehow Paul knew Agrippa believed the Bible. He appealed to his faith in the prophets in the Bible. It was upon the basis of the prophets that the early church preached the gospel. In almost every sermon you read in the book of Acts the apostles appealed to the authority of Old Testament prophets. Bible prophecy is a strong argument for faith in Jesus Christ.

Agrippa told Paul he almost could persuade him to become a Christian. Paul said it was his heart's desire that everyone who heard him become a Christian like him.

After Paul's speech everyone discussed Paul's situation. They all came to the conclusion that Paul was innocent and should not be in prison. However, because Paul appealed to Caesar he would remain in the Roman system until he was transported to Caesar.

Paul had an opportunity to preach to the Jews and after their rejection of the message the gospel went to the Gentiles beginning at Jerusalem and Caesarea with these Gentile Roman rulers. Paul testified to small and great alike the gospel of Jesus Christ. He shared his testimony and he preached the gospel.

What is your testimony? Do you know the gospel?

Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again from the dead on the third day. Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Shipwreck – Acts Chapter 27

Paul Sailed for Rome (Acts 27:1-12)

The apostle was accompanied by his fellow workers on the voyage. Paul found favor, not only with his former guards, but also with the Roman centurion. These verses outline the beginning of Paul's sea voyage to Rome. At one point he advised them against proceeding any further because he knew by the Spirit there was danger for the ship and men. Per usual, men do not take heed to God's man but instead listen to the worldly wisdom of those put in charge. As a result, they continue the voyage which will soon meet with disaster.

It stands out to me that God used Paul to warn them of danger. Oftentimes God used his humble servants to warn men of the danger in their lives. Christians are salt and light in this world, and by their life and words they warn sinners of the impending judgment of God. God will hold each man accountable for his life.

Unfortunately, these warnings often fall on deaf ears. Why? Because men are too busy paying attention to the professionals and the experts. They listen to the intellectual, the educated, the sophisticated who say there is no life after death, there is no heaven, no hell, no judgment. They try to calm the conscience of men with their lies about evolution and that everything was created from an explosion out of nothing.

Yet men still die every day and go to the judgment of God. As scripture warns us plainly. Hebrews 9:27, "*And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:*" But do men listen to this warning? No, they would rather take their chances with the deception of reincarnation. But what is the truth? The truth is that we die once. And after we die we give an account of our lives to God.

How do we prepare to meet God? Turn to God, humble yourself, and put your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Call upon the name of the Lord. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

The Storm At Sea (Acts 27:13-26)

As Paul predicted, a storm came up which threatened to destroy the ship and the life of the men in the ship. However, in the middle of this crisis upon the sea, the Lord sent an angel to speak to Paul. The angel told Paul that he would complete this trip and witness to Caesar. He also told Paul that God graciously would save the lives of every man on Paul's ship. Paul shared this message with the men on the ship, in order to build them up, to exhort them, and to comfort each one of them. Paul told them they would be saved, but lose the ship, and be cast upon a certain island.

Did they believe Paul now? It seemed their heart was open to hear from the man of God now that their lives were in danger.

Men's lives are in danger. Every single day life is in danger. Our lives are so fragile on this earth. You never know what a day may bring forth. This has been driven home to me recently with news about someone in my family who has been struck with a life threatening illness. It serves as a wake up call for everyone when we see how fragile life is on this earth.

The Lord provided salvation for everyone who believes the message. To all who hear the message, and receive, and believe, they are saved. The Bible says whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Storms come into every man's life. God has a purpose in allowing storms into our life. It is to get our attention upon what is the most important thing of all: faith in God. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face. Cry out to God most high, and unto God who does all things for us. He is mighty to save.

Scripture says the Lord will never leave us or forsake us. No matter what we are going through today God is our provider, our protector, and our portion forever. Amen.

The Shipwreck (Acts 27:27-44)

When the ship was in crisis the man of God took leadership.

The situation onboard the ship deteriorated quickly. People quit eating because they were afraid. As Paul predicted the ship approached some kind of land. The sailors used their skills to determine how close land was. At one point the sailors tried to escape the ship but Paul intervened. He told the soldiers to not let them escape. The soldiers cut the ropes on the lifeboats, and made sure everyone remained aboard until they crashed on an island.

Paul encouraged everyone to eat food. He prayed over the food and ate and everyone followed his example.

The ship crashed on the island and everyone made it out alive by swimming or floating to shore on broken pieces of the ship.

The Lord told Paul everyone would survive the crash. There was a point, however, in which those sailors who did not believe but wanted to take their lives into their own hands might have perished. Paul had to intervene with the soldiers to stop the unbelieving sailors from accidentally killing themselves. They had to stay with the ship.

When people are afraid or panic they tend to take their life into their own hands. But it is at those moments we need to trust in God and remember the word he gave us. God promised to save us if we will keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. If we will believe and trust in the Lord we will survive and make it through the storm. We may have to crash somewhere but the Lord will help us overcome.

Listen to what God says. What is his word for you today? What is God saying to you today? Do you have God's promise in your heart and mind? Are you trusting in him with all of your heart?

Don't let fear get into your heart. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind. People will not understand your faith, but they don't have to. You answer to the Lord and the Lord asks you to trust in him today.

Proverbs 3:5-6, *"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."*

Paul Preached In Rome – Chapter 28

Ashore on Malta (Acts 28:1-10)

They made it to shore and the natives treated them with kindness. They made the survivors a place of shelter and also a campfire so they could get warm and dry. Paul gathered firewood. A snake jumped out and bit Paul. When the natives saw this they assumed Paul was a murderer and that justice did not allow him to escape. However, when he did not die they changed their mind and thought he was a god. This was not the first time people reacted to Paul with superstition.

God used Paul on this island to heal people and bring them to the knowledge of the Lord. This was what Paul prayed for. He prayed his journey to Rome would be a prosperous journey in the will of God and that was what happened.

What is our definition of prosperity? A bible perspective on prosperity would be the salvation of the people on that island. And if it took a shipwreck for Paul to bring the gospel to that island then so be it. How did God get twelve sons of Jacob to Egypt? It took a worldwide famine for seven years. What did it take to get God's people out of Egypt? It took plagues and the miracle of the Red Sea dividing. What does it take for God to move in your life? If you have even a small faith then God will move mountains to accomplish his will in your life.

The fact this snake did not hurt Paul reminded me of the Lord's promise in Mark 16:18, "They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

Also, this reminded me of Luke 10:19, *"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you."*

The Lord protects his servant. Those who commit themselves into God's hands and obey his will for their life can expect for God to provide for them, and protect them. He is our portion forever. The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and are safe. Greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world.

The Lord has stomped the head of the serpent. Satan has been defeated by the Lord Jesus Christ. Death has been defeated. We are in Christ Jesus and are more than conquerors through him who loves us. Stand upon God's promises, continue to believe and trust in the Lord, and do not give up. Do not give in. Be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Paul Arrived In Italy (Acts 28:11-15)

After three months on the island they found transportation on another ship which sailed toward Rome. We can read their travel route and stops along the way in these verses. One part which stood out to me was verse 15, *"..whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.."* This stood out to me because we just looked at how Paul encouraged everyone on the doomed ship. God used Paul to make

sure everyone got safely to shore on the island. He also helped the people on the island and healed their leader.

Now, we see the human side of Paul. He was just a man, and he needed to be encouraged by his brothers in Christ just like we all do. Even the greatest apostles need to be encouraged and receive help from others. Never underestimate your gift and calling in the church. You may not be an apostle or prophet, but if you have a gift of encouraging others you are very important to God and the church. Paul was at a point where he needed the encouragement of the brothers who found him.

Paul was now in Italy and we are almost to the end of the record of Paul's missionary journeys. As we approach the end of the book of Acts let us reflect on God's faithfulness, how God provides for us, how God protects us, and how God always fulfills his promises to us.

What was the most important thing in Paul's life? His goal was to preach the gospel and bring as many people as he could into the kingdom of God. God used Paul for this purpose, but observe carefully how this looked for Paul on the ground. On a daily basis, Paul lived a hard life. Are we prepared in our heart and mind to endure hardness for the sake of Christ? Are we prepared to be misunderstood, slandered, rejected, and cast out? Are we prepared to endure persecution? Are we willing to accept God's provision in ways which are unpleasant or stressful?

Through it all, the lesson I learn from Paul's account is the Lord's faithfulness to always stand with him in every situation. The Lord never left Paul. He was with him in every trial and every trouble. The Lord stood with Paul, so that the message of the gospel could be fully known to great and small alike.

Paul Preached at Rome (Acts 28:16-31)

When Paul arrived in Rome he was not treated like other prisoners. He was given his own separate living quarters with one Roman soldier to keep an eye on him. The first thing on Paul's mind was communicating with the Jews in Rome. This was in keeping with Paul's pattern of ministry. He would always take the gospel to the Jews first, and then he would go to the Gentiles.

The Jews in Rome had no idea about how the Jews in Jerusalem wanted to kill Paul. They never received any letters, and there was no one with Paul on the ship who said anything bad about him. This shows that the Lord was able to shut the mouth of the devil. Paul had a clean slate with these Jews and was eager to preach the message to them.

They scheduled a specific date and a lot of the Jewish people showed up at Paul's house to hear his message. He taught them the gospel out of the Old Testament. Using the law and the prophets he taught them about the Lord Jesus Christ. He proved to them from Bible prophecy that Jesus is the Messiah, that he died upon the cross for our sins, that he was buried, and rose again on the third day. He also no doubt shared with them his personal testimony which we have heard several times in the book of Acts.

As always there were some who believed and some who did not believe. Paul gave those who did not believe a warning from the scriptures about their unbelief and rejection of the message. In this way, Paul fulfilled his duty to his own people in preaching to them the good news of Jesus Christ. It was not up to Paul if some believed or some did not believe. It was only Paul's job to preach the word and let people decide themselves if they would believe the truth.

This is all we can do. We are to be faithful to lift up the name of Jesus Christ. We are to be faithful to proclaim the good news.

All men are sinners. Our only hope to receive forgiveness of our sins is by putting our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and what he accomplished through his death, burial, and resurrection. Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day. The work that Jesus accomplished for us brings justification, sanctification, and glorification to anyone who will believe and call on the name of Jesus. Not only do we receive forgiveness of our sins but we have the opportunity to participate in God's plan for the future. Jesus will return to this earth and reign over all the nations. He will reign as king. We will have an opportunity to participate with the Lord Jesus in this kingdom. We can scarcely imagine what this all means yet.

My prayer is that you will hear the good news, and turn to God in repentance, and put your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. This is the purpose of this entire bible commentary that I have written.

I pray this commentary will build you up in your faith, encourage you to continue to study God's word and obey what he tells you, and also be comforted by the Holy Spirit in all the troubles you face in life.

Lift up your eyes. The Son of God will appear in the sky one day. The Lord will return for his people. He will heal us, and bring us into his house. He opens the door to us and he says, "Welcome home." Amen.

Mike Kines
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